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Under the Spell of Wagner: The Revue Wagnérienne and Literary Experimentation in the Belle Epoque (1878-1893)

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**UNDER THE SPELL OF WAGNER:
THE *REVUE WAGNERIENNE* AND LITERARY EXPERIMENTATION IN THE
BELLE EPOQUE (1878-1893)**

Adeline Anastasia Heck

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role played by the discovery of Richard Wagner's music on avant-garde French writers between 1860 and 1890. More specifically, it focuses on the case study of the *Revue wagnérienne* (1885-1888) and the works of fiction published by its main contributors. My thesis argues that Wagnerian aesthetics were instrumental in helping late nineteenth-century French writers distance themselves from traditional literature, leading them to innovate with free verse and interior monologue, as well as establishing the foundations for Symbolist theater. Setting key articles from the *Revue wagnérienne* in dialogue with novels, prose poems and plays penned by its contributors, I posit that the *Revue* and the prose narratives authored by its participants furnished the belle époque with characteristic aesthetic ideals such as artistic synthesis, poetic musicality and the pursuit of interiority, thus opening the gates to literary modernity in France.

While the connection between Wagner and Symbolism appears to be well-trodden ground, this dissertation forges a path away from existing scholarship, which typically centers either on literary concerns or on music history without merging the two. By contrast, this interdisciplinary study brings together contemporary musicology, literary criticism and archival research, always attempting to tease out connections between concrete listening experiences in the concert hall and the works of fiction that were published in their aftermath. This thesis also includes rare documents and unpublished manuscripts which help complete the picture of their author's personal connection towards Wagner and have never been discussed in existing studies of French Wagnerism.

Through close textual analysis, I draw out previously undiscovered connections between Wagnerian theoretical texts, Wagnerian music drama and Symbolist literature. The dissertation's most significant contribution to scholarship is that it devotes sustained attention to writers who used to wield intellectual prestige over their contemporaries but have since been neglected. This choice is reflected in a corpus that blends famous and unknown names, from Catulle Mendès and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam—two Wagnerites who met Wagner personally in 1869—and the younger Édouard Dujardin and Teodor de Wyzewa, both of whom transformed the *Revue* into a laboratory of ideas. All of them wrestled with the ideal of artistic totality—Wagner's famed concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—with varying results. For Wagner's aesthetics relied not just on the notion of a perfect synthesis between the arts but also on the desire to encapsulate the world in its entirety, a goal he pursued both by including an incredible amount of detail in his writings and by creating dramatic works of extraordinary scale. My contention is that the Symbolists were sensitive to the absurdity inherent to Wagner's elusive creative pursuit and subsequently crafted experimental narratives featuring anti-heroes incapable of sexual or artistic fulfillment. In doing so, they relieved creators of the extreme creative agency exemplified by Wagner and proposed an alternative model in which the reader's active engagement with the text is required. This lesson was to be remembered by Modernist writers such as James Joyce, Valéry Larbaud and T.S. Eliot.

À Catherine et Josefa,
Entre la France, l'Autriche et l'Amérique.

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On a more personal note, I want to stress that this dissertation's *raison d'être* is to build bridges between the different lives I have lived so far. Being the product of a Franco-American marriage, it is no coincidence I am merging these two cultures by writing about French authors in English. My mother, Catherine Sauvat is a writer and researcher herself, who specializes in Austrian literature from the 1900s. Although I was reluctant to follow in her footsteps at first and fancied an operatic career, I enjoyed a truly unique education at home where I was exposed to literature at a very young age and was encouraged to interact with artworks with both appreciation and a critical mindset. Although my father Cyril Heck passed away when I was a child, I have been keen to reconnect with his native culture and came to the United States in order to do so. An opera fan himself—although not a Wagnerian—I would like to think he would have enjoyed parts of my work. My uncle, Bertrand Sauvat was an opera director and is the one who got me into opera at the age of five when he showed me a production of Grétry's *Zémir et Azor* he had staged. He passed away one month before my father. Many of the books that I used for my research were his and this dissertation thus pays homage to his work and the fire he ignited in me.

The reason I was interested in writing about Wagner in the first place was because I fell in love with his music at age sixteen after seeing a production of *Tristan und Isolde* in Paris. As a budding singer, it was my dream to interpret the great dramatic mezzo-soprano roles like Ortrud and Kundry. Alas, I did not stick to it, so this dissertation is my personal attempt at capturing some of that passion and putting it into writing. From all the training I did as a singer between the age of fifteen and twenty-two, I learned to trust my capacity for resilience and my ability to focus on a single artistic object for long periods of time. I was also able to forge an extremely important relationship in my life with my former voice teacher and chosen father Dale Schriemer. Although I switched paths and let go of a singing career, I have strived to create a sense of continuity between our work together and my own teaching and research.

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Introduction

“C’est proprement par un sortilège qu’il nous a conquis,
par l’enchantement d’un breuvage magique qui toujours,
désormais, nous rendra dociles à sa voix.”
(Teodor de Wyzewa, *Beethoven et Wagner* 116)

There is a long-standing convention in writing about Wagner, be it in music reviews or scholarly books, to mention his music's peculiar “magic” along with the “spells” he weaves on his listeners. This truism, however, has yet to receive a proper definition. Although magic is a recurrent topos in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera in connection to the concept of *le merveilleux*, the Wagnerian brand of magic is understood to be a separate phenomenon and one that has little to do with the actual presence of wizards or sorceresses on the stage.¹ At first glance, it appears to be a metaphor which serves to express a case of *je ne sais quoi*, an inexplicable quality that helps explain Wagnerian music's uniqueness and its potent appeal to the emotions and the senses. This is congruent with the experience of most of its admirers, as made evident by the psychoanalyst Michel Poizat in an interview with an opera fan: “C'est le côté vertigineux de Wagner, qu'il n'y a pas ailleurs. (...) Il y a des gens qui sont complètement bouffés, qui ne vivent que par Wagner...” (*L'Opéra ou le cri de l'ange* 41). Although rather informal in nature, this quotation touches on two important elements: first, the music's capacity to conjure the sublime—as evoked by the adjective “vertigineux”—and second, the fact that such a vertigo cannot be found elsewhere, hence a repeated pursuit of Wagnerian performances to achieve that same effect.

As with other issues that are still being discussed to this day vis-à-vis Wagner—his anti-Semitism, his willingness to preside over a cult that glorified his person as much as his art, his

¹ On that history, see Jean Starobinski's *Les Enchanteresses* (9-34). In Wagnerian works, the only characters with a gift for magic are Ortrud in *Lohengrin* and Klingsor in *Parsifal*, both of whom are antagonists. Only *Die Feen* (1834), a work of juvenilia that never saw the lights of the stage during Wagner's lifetime, deals with the supernatural through and through.

chauvinistic take on German culture—we owe the magic *topos* to Nietzsche. In the postscript to *The Case of Wagner* (1888), he denounced his former friend—who had died five years previously—as a seducer of the most fiendish type, an accusation that was preceded by a detailing of Wagner's *modus operandi*. Wagner's true power, Nietzsche surmised, was to win over his listeners with the aid of a shameless appeal to their libido:

Die Anhängerschaft an Wagner zahlt sich theuer. Was macht sie aus dem Geist? (...) Ihm eignet jede Zweideutigkeit, jeder Doppelsinn, alles überhaupt, was die Ungewissen überredet, ohne ihnen zum Bewußtsein zu bringen, wofür sie überredet sind. Damit ist Wagner ein Verführer großen Stils. (*Der Fall Wagner* 43-4)

One pays heavily for being one of Wagner's disciples. What does it do to the spirit? (...) He is distinguished by every ambiguity, every double sense, everything quite generally that persuades those who are uncertain without making them aware *of what* they have been persuaded. Thus Wagner is a seducer on a large scale. (183)

In doing so, Nietzsche connected the music's particular draw—in other words, its magic—to sexuality and condemned it in the same gesture. According to him, musical eroticism exposes the philosopher to harm since he/she should derive clarity and peace of mind from the artistic experience.² Repeated exposures to Wagner's charms, he argued throughout *The Case of Wagner*, had weakened him and perverted his musical taste by making him crave heightened sensual stimulation as a listener of music. It thus became his mission to find an antidote that could restore him to his true self. That was what he found in Bizet's *Carmen*, an opera that did not make him “sweat” despite its hypersexualization of Spanish women, or the final murder of its male protagonist.³

² A passage from Nietzsche's personal notebooks explicitly connects sexual abstinence with greater artistic productivity: “To succumb, to waste oneself is traitorous to an artist: it betrays a lack of instinct, of will in general, it can be a sign of decadence” (quoted in *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* 133).

³ Here I am referring to the first section of *The Case of Wagner*: “wie nachtheilig ist mir dieser Wagnerische Orchesterklang! Ich heisse ihn Sirocco. Ein verdriesslicher Schweiss bricht an mir aus. Mit meinem guten Wetter ist es vorbei” (1-2). / “how harmful for me is this Wagnerian orchestral tone! I call it *sirocco*. I break out into a disagreeable sweat. My good weather is gone” (157).

As Jean Starobinski reminds us, famous seducers have long been seen to cause fright because they threaten to lead us astray, all the way to a sure death: “La séduction, dans les emblèmes moraux d'autrefois, marquait le point où les chemins bifurquent. Elle promet le savoir et le plaisir, mais conduit à la mort” (*Les Enchanteresses* 9). By this logic, listening to Wagner and taking pleasure in his music equals not only a deviation from the musical norm, but also a danger to our well-being. As a matter of fact, many late nineteenth-century medical texts concurred, taking issue with the sensory overload induced by Wagner's totalizing aesthetics, which they argued could lead to permanent nerve damage, mood disorders and “deviant” sexuality.⁴ In 1894, an American psychiatrist, Aldred Warthin at the University of Michigan, posited that indulging in Wagnerian music was equivalent to entering a state of rapture. As he explained, it was reportedly triggered by “a condition of self-induced hypnosis” that sometimes scandalously led to orgasms (*Bad Vibrations* 82). Nietzsche was of the same mind and mused that not just philosophers but “vulnerable” populations should refrain from listening to Wagnerian music: “Wagner ist schlimm für die Jünglinge; er ist verhängnisvoll für das Weib” (46) / “Wagner is bad for youths; he is calamitous for women” (185). In sum, for Nietzsche or Warthin, being a devout Wagnerian meant being afflicted with a form of sickness that was especially malignant because it acted without the sufferer's knowledge.

But what could have motivated Wagner to create art that could not just bewitch his audience but also curse them with a psychosexual disease? A partial response is provided in *The Case of Wagner*, where Wagner is compared to a famous mythological figure who also persuades her listeners with “Überredung der Sinnlichkeit, die ihrerseits wieder den Geist mürbe und müde

⁴ See chapter 3 in James Kennaway's *Bad Vibrations* (63-97). For an analysis of the supposed link between Wagnerian music and homosexuality, see Laurence Dreyfus's “Homoerotics” chapter in *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (175-217).

macht. Die Musik als Circe...” (44). / “sensuousness which in turn makes the spirit weary and worn-out. Music as Circe” (183). In referring to the enchantress from the *Odyssey*, she who lures Odysseus's companions to her palace with the aid of her melodious voice before handing them a beverage that will turn them into pigs, Nietzsche implied that Wagner performed a similarly degrading transformation on spectators, with his music standing in for Circe's magic potion. Yet, just as in the Homeric myth, Wagner's intentions remain enigmatic and the true extent of his powers, unclear. Is magic a means of asserting dominance for self-glorifying purposes? Is it a tool with which to punish hypocrites who deny the existence of their sexual desires? How long does this Wagner-induced state of bestiality last outside of the opera house? Can it have repercussions on the real world?

For Nietzsche, as well as other turn-of-the-century writers, invoking Circe was a means of representing a fear of castration, in other words, of imagining their powers of creation neutralized by an experience so engrossing it would make all other artworks irrelevant. In this regard, it is no mistake that Nietzsche likened Wagner to a femme fatale: this feminization was in fact part of a strategy of resistance, casting Wagner as a regressive “feminine” decadent and Nietzsche as a forward-thinking “male” creator.⁵ In *The Case of Wagner*, this castration anxiety crystallizes into Nietzsche's recourse to one of Wagner's most memorable antagonists: the magician Klingsor from *Parsifal*. The reference is especially loaded since Klingsor castrated himself in despair after being rejected from the Grail knights' chaste community due to a prior sexual transgression. However, far from working in his favor, this act of self-mutilation forces his exile from the brotherhood. Having become a pariah, he attempts to avenge himself by controlling all around him with the aid

⁵ For more on Circe as fearsome fin-de-siècle femme fatale, see Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (321-5).

of his newfound magical powers, promptly turning a nearby desert into a garden of delights and baiting the knights who shunned him with beautiful women acting as his puppets.

In Nietzsche's view, Wagnerian music was similarly the product of an outsider bent on harming a society—in his case, Germany—from which he had been excluded on political grounds.⁶ According to this logic, Wagnerian art mirrors Klingsor's attacks on those he envies, showing an intense drive to subjugate the people who banished him:

Trinkt nur, meine Freunde, die Philtren dieser Kunst! Ihr findet nirgends eine angenehmere Art, euren Geist zu entnerven, eure Männlichkeit unter einem Rosengebüsche zu vergessen... Ah dieser alte Zauberer! Dieser Klingsor aller Klingsore! Wie er uns damit den Krieg macht! uns, den freien Geistern! Wie er jeder Feigheit der modernen Seele mit Zaubermädchen-Tönen zu Willen redet!—Es gab nie einen solchen Todhass auf die Erkenntniss!—Man muss Cyniker sein, um hier nicht verführt zu werden, man muss beißen können, um hier nicht anzubeten. Wohlan, alter Verführer! Der Cyniker warnt dich—*cave canem*... (45)

Drink, O my friends, the philters of this art! Nowhere will you find a more agreeable way of enervating your spirit, of forgetting your manhood under a rosebush.—Ah, this old magician! This Klingsor of all Klingsors! How he thus wages war against *us*! us, the free spirits! How he indulges every cowardice of the modern soul with the tones of magic maidens!—Never before has there been such a *deadly hatred* of the search for knowledge!—One has to be a cynic in order not to be seduced here; one has to be able to bite in order not to worship here. Well then, you old seducer, the cynic warns you—*cave canem*. (184)

Through its luxuriousness and erotic musical strategies, the music enslaves the listener who gradually loses his/her ability to use their intellect and maintain a sense of critical detachment.⁷

The problem, according to Nietzsche, is especially egregious in the case of young artists who are more likely to “forget their manhood” (i.e. their critical mindset and individual artistic voice) under

⁶ “Das man sich in Deutschland über Wagner betrügt, befremdet mich nicht. Das Gegentheil würde mich befremden. Die Deutschen haben sich einen Wagner zurecht gemacht, den sie verehren können...” (13). /That people in Germany should deceive themselves about Wagner does not surprise me. The opposite would surprise me. The Germans have constructed a Wagner for themselves whom they can revere...” (165). Wagner lived in exile starting in 1849 when his leftist revolutionary beliefs and his participation in the May Uprising in Dresden—part of the European wave of 1848 revolutions—put him on the Saxon government's criminal list. He only came back to the country in 1862 and settled in Biebrich before moving to Bavaria.

⁷ These formal strategies are detailed by Laurence Dreyfus in “Harmonies,” *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (73-116). They include intensified chromaticism, ninth chords and a delay of the resolution of dissonances.

the alluring “rosebush” of an art that is all too consuming, *precisely because* it is feminized.⁸ To fight off this menace, one should use “eine Selbstdisciplin von Nöthen” (ii) / “a special self-discipline” (155) that would succeed in achieving “eine tiefe Entfremdung, Erkältung, Ernüchterung gegen alles Zeitliche, Zeitgemässe” (Idem) / “a profound estrangement, cold, sobering up—against everything that is of this time” (Idem). Only in doing so could the philosopher pen a theoretical text like *The Case of Wagner*, one that would scrupulously dismantle the pieces of the Wagnerian seduction machine in order to reveal the shallowness at its core.

And yet, none of the writers examined in the present dissertation adopted the same distancing tactics as Nietzsche. In fact, all of them wrote articles and works of literature—novels, short stories, prose poems, plays, etc.—while under the spell of Wagner. For some mysterious reason, their long-term journalistic activity as Wagnerian listeners and propagandists did not hinder their creativity; rather it coincided with a period of intense literary experimentation that saw these writers spearhead some of the most audacious texts and aesthetic theories of their time. Their list of accomplishments includes the inauguration of what has come to be known as Symbolist theater (Villiers and Dujardin), the invention of interior monologue (Dujardin) and the establishment of the theoretical foundations for the Symbolist school (Wyzewa). This poses the question of whether or not they suffered from a similar fear of castration as Nietzsche, and, if so, what methods they were able to put into place in order to recuperate their artistic autonomy and innovate while they were so engrossed with Wagner.

⁸ I will go into more details with regard to Nietzsche's description of Wagner as feminine in chapter 1. For now, see Lawrence Kramer: “The feminization of the artist, and in particular of the artist who works in a certain evocative fin-de-siècle style, provokes a good deal of male anxiety. For one thing it attacks the stability of gender on which the privileged definition of masculinity depends. For another, it threatens to degrade the status of art itself, which in a culture based on masculine privilege can possess authority only if it is thought of as man's work. The feminized artist is a symptom of decadence in the pejorative sense...” (*Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* 139).

Far from ignoring or diminishing the perceived contradiction between being a faithful disciple of Wagner and being an inventive artist, this dissertation argues that it was indeed that dual profile that led these writers to open the gates for literary modernity as we know it. It was precisely because they knew Wagner well and were fully cognizant of his music's erotic and philosophical dimension that they felt pressured to redefine literature as a totalizing art form that could engage the mind without forgetting the senses. But once they saw themselves confronted with the magnitude of the task at hand, in other words, of writing texts that could fully emulate the multidimensionality of their Wagnerian model without the help of music, they resorted to irony and satire as a means of coping with that realization. Hence, the “antiroman,” these tonally tentative but formally daring Symbolist novels that are part of what Valérie Michelet-Jacquod calls an “art de l'extrême conscience,” which self-consciously parodies the idols of the day, from Naturalism to Wagner.⁹

Pace Nietzsche, I argue that Wagnerian magic should be envisaged as a beneficial form of inspiration, a force that can lead a writer to reinvent himself/herself and question his/her poetics in light of their repeated attendance at the opera house or the concert hall. Although the influence of Wagner is not always retraceable thematically, I contend that it does appear obliquely in all of the prose writings I analyze in this study. That is to say that the reception of Wagnerian aesthetic theories by the Symbolists is directly linked to characteristic aesthetic ideals from the belle époque such as artistic synthesis, poetic musicality and the pursuit of interiority.

In order to develop this argument, I will undertake a detailed examination of relevant case studies in French literature from the early belle époque, the same period during which Nietzsche

⁹ See the second chapter from *Le Roman symboliste: un art de l'extrême conscience* for a full detailing of the various parodic means with which the Symbolist novel became an anti-novel that stood up to the existing novelistic tradition (57-85).

wrote *The Case of Wagner*. The first chapter focuses on two Wagnerians from the 1860s-1880s—Catulle Mendès and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam—while chapter two and three each center a Symbolist from the next generation: Édouard Dujardin (the co-founder and lead editor of the *Revue wagnérienne*) and Teodor de Wyzewa (the *Revue wagnérienne*'s lead theorist), respectively. To keep the extent of my inquiry manageable, I chose to limit the corpus to authors who contributed to the *Revue wagnérienne* (1885-1888) on multiple occasions and wrote works of fiction influenced by Wagner in the long 1880s.

Each chapter privileges key works of fiction in order to convey a comprehensive picture of a given writer's Wagnerism, with occasional discussions of journalistic articles they dedicated to Wagner. In chapter 1, we have close readings of Mendès's novel *Le Roi vierge* (1881) and Villiers's short story “Le secret de l'ancienne musique” (1878); in chapter 2, I am mostly concerned with Dujardin's collection of short stories *Les Hantises* (1885), the prose poems “À la gloire d'Antonia” (1886), *Pour la vierge du roc ardent* (1888) and the novella *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887); while in chapter 3, I analyze Wyzewa's novel *Valbert* (1893). On occasion, I have referenced later works—Dujardin's novel *L'Initiation au péché et à l'amour* (1898) and Wyzewa's fictional autobiography *Le Cahier rouge* (1917)—only because they complete the picture of their authors' wavering dedication to the Wagnerian cause and attest to their growing disenchantment with Wagner and Symbolism.

This decision to delve into French literary Wagnerism from the 1880s was dictated by a dearth of scholarship on the subject, particularly from specialists in French literature. Indeed, there is no existing monograph that exclusively studies the prose narratives associated with *La Revue wagnérienne* and their connection to the nascent Symbolist movement, while the most canonical text that appeared in the *Revue*, Mallarmé's “Rêverie d'un poète français” (1885) has more often

than not been separated from the context of its original publication. This neglect can be partially explained by the fact that most nineteenth-century French literature specialists tend to think of Wagnerism as a minor phenomenon that is in large part connected to Baudelaire—i.e. the *Tannhäuser* struggle of the early 1860s—before Proust made a number of Wagnerian references in *À la Recherche du temps perdu* in the 1910s/1920s. In between, they tend to acknowledge the 1880s because of Mallarmé but refrain from mentioning those who convinced him to attend Wagnerian concerts in the first place, that is, his Symbolist disciples Dujardin and Wyzewa. This is due to their status as *minore* authors, a position they share with Catulle Mendès. My purpose, therefore, is to redress this imbalance in scholarship, which has led to an impoverished understanding of the scope of Wagner's impact on modern French literature.

Scholars of Symbolism pose another problem: in spite of their recognition of Wagner's importance for fin-de-siècle literature, they often restrict themselves to the mention of the *Revue wagnérienne* without delving into the texts it produced, or the Wagnerian content of the novels that surrounded it. Thus, if *Les Lauriers sont coupés* gets a full chapter in Valérie Michelet-Jacquod's *Le Roman symboliste* (2008), Wagner's influence on the novel is not a main thread in her analysis, just as it is not in her scholarly edition of *Valbert* (2009). Similarly, contemporary specialists on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam have yet to publish a full-length study of his personal and artistic involvement with Wagner, with little having been written on that subject since Alan Raitt's chapter on Wagner in his seminal study, *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* (1965). As for Catulle Mendès, his contributions to Wagnerism have yet to receive adequate specialist treatment, a statement I can extend to his literary output as a whole.

And yet, time and time again, in the most important theoretical texts of Symbolism, Wagner is not only mentioned but cited as a beloved rival, one who ought to be surpassed in future works

of literature. Years later, Paul Valéry eloquently explained the connection between this competitiveness with Wagner and Symbolist innovations like free verse and interior monologue:

On peut dire sans exagération que toutes les recherches importantes, toutes les innovations techniques en poésie (et dans une partie de la prose) qui se sont vues depuis l'époque de Baudelaire, sont dues à l'extrême attention que les grandes œuvres musicales et en particulier celles de Wagner, ont excitée dans les têtes littéraires. (...) Le contraste parfois si douloureux que nous trouvions entre l'énorme puissance des moyens de l'orchestre et la pauvreté relative des ressources du langage nous tourmentait. ("Symbolisme et musique" 92-3)

Notice the term "contrast" used by Valéry: it alludes to the conflict I highlighted above with Nietzsche and his resentment over Wagnerian magic, which is defined by Valéry here as "l'énorme puissance des moyens de l'orchestre." In the case of the Symbolists, this clash of words vs. music made itself felt in an attitude of simultaneous reverence and irreverence vis-à-vis Wagner. This fundamental attribute of French Wagnerism in the 1880s has gone unnoticed by critics, who prefer to emphasize just how devoted to Wagner these writers were.

This points to a paradox characterizing the French reception of Wagner in the nineteenth century and the way it has been documented by academics. Although we tend to think of the *Tannhäuser* debacle of 1861 as the height of the French hostility against Wagner, the literary writings from that time are mostly deferential and, with the notable exception of Baudelaire's essay "Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris" (1861), unambitious. As I will demonstrate in the prologue, they repeated the Wagnerian party line because their authors had heard very little of Wagner's music and needed to educate both themselves and their readers. However, in the 1880s, more French writers took trips to Germany, due to the opening of the Bayreuth Festival and the success of the premiere of *Parsifal* in 1882.¹⁰ There, they heard Wagner in German and in full, but unlike their predecessors from the 1860s, they were able to rely on exegetic treatises like Édouard

¹⁰ Albert Lavignac's best-selling travel book, *Le Voyage artistique à Bayreuth* (1897) lists all French attendees of the Festival starting in the year of its inception, 1876 (548-78).

Schuré's *Le Drame musical* (1875) in order to decipher their experience. However, this enthusiasm for Bayreuth was set against the backdrop of fierce French antagonism against German art due to France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Although this period of cultural hostility had concrete consequences for Wagner and his supporters in Paris—in the form of brawls, street riots and quarrels in the press—it also encouraged French listeners to think more critically about their involvement with Wagner. My contention is that this particular cultural climate also facilitated the constant reinterpretation of Wagnerian theories that is one of the most important characteristics of the *Revue wagnérienne*. This circumstantial inventiveness is part of what makes French Wagnerism of the 1880s such an exciting movement to study.

For all of this fascinating complexity, English-language scholarship on French Wagnerism from the 1880s is scarce. Further, the majority has been produced by musicologists—Steven Huebner, or Annegret Fauser—and one historian, Kelly J. Maynard.¹¹ Literary scholars, however, have so far failed to do it full justice. It is also worthy of attention that in the most frequently cited text on French Wagnerism, Gerald Turbow's chapter “Art, Politics and Wagnerism in France” (1984), only a few pages are dedicated to the 1880s, as opposed to the long buildup leading up to the failed *Tannhäuser* at the Paris Opéra in 1861. In more recent years, however, there has been a renewal of interest in the *Revue wagnérienne* as an avant-garde periodical, with important studies by Kelly J. Maynard and the French literature specialist Pamela Genova.¹² There has also been a

¹¹ Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (1999); Annegret Fauser, *The Politics of Musical Identity: Selected Essays* (2015) and “New Media, Source-Bonding and Alienation: Listening at the 1889 Exposition Universelle,” *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939* (40-57). Kelly J. Maynard's dissertation *The Enemy Within: Encountering Wagner in Early Third Republic France* (2007) is the most comprehensive document of them all but it has not yet been published as a monograph.

¹² Respectively, in Maynard's article “Strange Bedfellows at the *Revue Wagnérienne*: Wagnerism at the Fin de Siècle,” *French Historical Studies* 38:4 (October 2015): 633-659; and Genova's book *Symbolist Journals: A Culture of Correspondence* (2002) and her chapter “A Collective Experiment in Literary Journalism: The Case of *La Revue Wagnérienne*” in the 2016 volume *Models of Collaboration in Nineteenth-Century French Literature*.

wave of articles on the founder of the *Revue wagnérienne* Édouard Dujardin, with excellent analyses of his relationship to Wagner coming from his most recent translator into English, Anthony Suter, as well as Steven Huebner and Kelly J. Maynard.¹³ Maynard and Huebner's work, in particular, have been a useful source of information in my own efforts. As for the other authors featured in this dissertation, Mendès, Wyzewa and Villiers, there are simply no English texts devoted to their relationship to Wagner and, in the case of Wyzewa or Mendès, very little about them in English overall.

Few literary critics have tackled the issue of Wagner's influence on French literature, perhaps due to a longstanding academic fear of discussing music outside of the theoretical framework of music analysis or cultural history. The only existing detailed study of French Wagnerism from a literary standpoint was published in French by Cécile Leblanc in 2005. Entitled *Wagnérisme et création: 1883-1889*, this lengthy monograph has great ambitions: first, to document the impact of Wagner on French literature of the 1880s, second, to undertake the close analysis of novels and poems by Symbolist and Decadent authors that feature Wagner and his ideas, and third, to launch into an exploration of French Wagnerism in music.¹⁴ The *Revue wagnérienne* itself only takes up one chapter and makes occasional appearances in her chapter on Dujardin.

¹³ See Suter's 1991 preface to *The Bays Are Sere* (*Les Lauriers sont coupés*); Huebner's article "Édouard Dujardin, Wagner, and the Origins of Stream of Consciousness Writing," *19th-Century Music* 37:1 (Summer 2013): 56-88; and Maynard's "The Ill-Equipped Modernist: Historicizing Édouard Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés*," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 43:3 (December 2017): 42-62.

¹⁴ Here I should stress that if there were some confusion at the turn of century with respect to just how interchangeable Symbolism and the Decadence were—as illustrated by Ferdinand Brunetière's 1888 article "Symbolistes et Décadents [sic]"—they are now seen as two separate movements with some overlap. Valérie Michelet-Jacquod provides a useful clarification in chapter 2 of *Le Roman symboliste* (58-64). The main takeaway is that the Symbolists were more formally adventurous and generally more willing to contemplate the ethics of literature, i.e. their responsibility in how the reader may engage with their texts.

My own approach is more restrained and, therefore, more focused. In my dissertation, I choose to concentrate solely on prose narratives, which explains the absence of Mallarmé. Most of the texts I examine here were not included by Leblanc in her wide study and help provide a better picture of the connection between the articles published by their authors in the *Revue wagnérienne* and the works of fiction that shortly preceded or followed them. Methodologically, my work distinguishes itself from Leblanc's painstaking depiction of the cultural context of 1880s Wagnerism. My work on that era and its cultural history is more synthetic. This viewpoint opens up the possibility of making broader claims about the impact of Wagnerism on literary modernity while speculating on how aesthetic discussions from the 1880s paved the way for European Modernism.

Thus, this dissertation diverges significantly from the studies referenced above. For one, it leaves aside the question of the *Revue* as an avant-garde periodical because it has been thoroughly explored by Genova and Maynard. Nor is its primary purpose to describe how the *Revue* was a catalyst for the emergence of Symbolism, the January 1886 Wagner sonnets and their reception having already been studied by Jean-Nicolas Illouz in the 2005 article “Les manifestes symbolistes.” Nor does it cover the history of the *Revue's* conception by Dujardin and Chamberlain, all of which have been more than adequately discussed by Leblanc and Maynard. Rather, the task I have set for myself is to reflect on the wider modalities of a writer's long-term dual aesthetic and philosophical engagement with Wagner. In order to do so, I invoke tools and concepts from different disciplines before adding these insights to what would otherwise be a collection of close readings informed by nineteenth-century cultural history.

First, I was heavily influenced by recent work in historical musicology by Katharine Ellis, Annegret Fauser and Steven Huebner. Not only did their work guide me towards greater historical

accuracy in my short summaries of the French reception of Wagner but they also showed me that modern-day musicology can be just as adept at analyzing music reviews, administrative documents from opera houses, or novels, as it does scores. Second, I relied on the expertise of specialists of Symbolism like Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Jean-Nicolas Illouz, Bertrand Marchal and Valérie Michelet-Jacquod in order to place this dissertation in the wider literary context in which it belongs, a connection that neither literature specialists or musicologists usually make. And finally, my dissertation owes much in spirit to the emerging field of words-and-music studies. Theorists such as Peter Dayan, Lawrence Kramer and Eric Prieto have been instrumental in my growing realization that music and literature are two fundamentally discrete languages whose occasional juxtaposition produces complex theoretical problems, from the question of musical meaning to the necessarily imperfect nature of verbal descriptions of music.

I also took inspiration from Carolyn Abbate's famous dichotomy of music as a “drastic” vs. “gnostic” experience—first proposed in her article “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?”—, which has helped music scholars grow more comfortable in adopting a subjective viewpoint in their work.¹⁵ Music researchers have since felt encouraged to integrate non-material aspects of music—most of which pertains to live performance—into their analyses of scores and other historical documents. In the case of this dissertation, I derived more concrete ways of discussing musical performance from New Musicology as well as from feminist and queer musicology. All of these fields have helped me draw from my past experience as an opera singer and my long-term activity as a listener and spectator of Wagner. In this sense, this dissertation is not only interdisciplinary but also

¹⁵ Abbate's article was published in *Critical Inquiry*. 30:3 (Spring 2004): 505-536. This embrace of subjectivity I am describing here was preceded by theoretical innovations coming from the new fields of feminist musicology, a movement spearheaded by Susan McClary's classic *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (1991), and queer musicology, with the seminal 1994 book *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* edited by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas.

represents a personal opportunity to unravel the particular raw emotional power of Wagnerian music and its effects on those who are sensitive to it. As an admirer of Wagner myself and one who has long been familiar with his works and spent formative years studying them, I admit to having written this dissertation from a sympathetic viewpoint that may not be shared by all of my readers. I have also sought to provide extensive signposting of studies that handle the more problematic aspects of his art and philosophy such as his anti-Semitism and his nationalism.

I will finish these methodological considerations with the paradoxical observation that most of the scholarship concerned with Wagner and his impact on the arts has neglected to engage with his works, be they theoretical or musical. My dissertation has sought to remedy this problem by citing the greatest living Wagner specialists—from Thomas S. Grey to John Deathridge and Barry Millington—and by selecting relevant excerpts from Wagnerian texts, from his essays and correspondence to his music dramas, often quoting from them in juxtaposition with Symbolist prose. This reciprocity of Wagnerian and Symbolist texts is the most novel aspect of this dissertation. Despite their somewhat tedious and repetitive nature, reading Wagner closely delivered insights that have impacted my close readings of Symbolist prose and also strengthened my attempts at defining key Symbolist aesthetic principles such as the notion of lifelike art that so obsessed Wyzewa, or the search for the Idea.

My final objective for this introduction is to give the reader a working definition of French Wagnerism of the 1880s and its characteristics, one that will guide him/her in reading these case studies. To this end, I provide here a list of its most important attributes:

1) Shifting Tone: Reverence/Irreverence

French Wagnerism is primarily defined by a conflict of interest: can one be a patriotic French citizen, claim to be influenced by the French literary tradition and also incorporate Wagnerian elements into a work of fiction? The writers in this corpus all provide different answers to that problem but they have one commonality: a tendency towards satire. In Symbolist and Decadent texts, the omnipresence of parody signals a sense of disenchantment with democracy, shifting gender norms and the growing influence of capitalism.¹⁶ This nostalgic ethos was perhaps best captured by the French novelist Paul Bourget, in an 1880 article bidding farewell both to the recently deceased composer Jacques Offenbach and a bygone artistic levity associated with the Second Empire: “C'est que la parodie est dans les moelles de notre époque, parce qu'elle n'est qu'un des avatars exaspérés de l'esprit critique, et que cette époque est surtout critique” (*Le Parlement*, October 10, 1880). But parody is also an effective means of invigorating a new school of thought and overcoming artistic inertia. By relying on intertextual connections with works from the established literary canon, from Greek mythology—as in Jules Laforgue's *Moralités légendaires* (1887)—to contemporary masters like Zola—as J.K. Huysmans did in *À rebours* (1884)—Symbolist and Decadent writers were emboldened to challenge literary conventions.¹⁷ And as Wagner was enjoying a niche but fervent following among the avant-garde in France in the 1880s, he also became a target for literary irreverence, as for instance Laforgue's short story “Lohengrin, fils de Parsifal”—from the same *Moralités légendaires* and published the same year as Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés*—suggests.¹⁸

¹⁶ A classic study of the phenomenon is Daniel Sangsue's *La Parodie*.

¹⁷ See Michèle Hannoosh, *Parody and Decadence, Laforgue's Moralités légendaires* (1-30); and Daniel Grojnowski, *Le Sujet d'À rebours* (22).

¹⁸ The final reveal in Laforgue's short story being that Elsa was in fact a man, thus overthrowing the ideal heterosexual romance that had already begun to dissolve due to the new couple's endless petty arguments.

Irony toward Wagner also served the purpose of hinting at vulnerabilities in the notion of the total work of art, which the Symbolists intuitively aimed to set right in their own writings. Although Wagner conceived of his music drama as a synthetic art form, he was still indebted to Left-Hegelian dialectics, as his Zürich writings (1849-1851) made apparent. Furthermore, according to Thomas S. Grey, he relied on the theoretical legacy of the Weimar classical school in more ways than one, especially so vis-à-vis “the binarisms of idealist metaphysics,” be they form vs. content or mind vs. matter.¹⁹ Dujardin and his more philosophically inclined collaborator Teodor de Wyzewa encountered similar difficulties. Together they showed their discomfort with binaries by turning Descartes into a straw man of French literary history, declaring that his overwhelming influence had pushed French writers to worship rationalism to the detriment of all else.²⁰

In their fiction, they sought to restore the balance between what Wyzewa called the three domains of human experience (in Symbolist parlance, “the soul”): “notions” (rationality), “sensations” (multisensory experiences) and “emotions” (psychology).²¹ If their attempts at synthesis were indeed Wagnerian, their fiction is based on the premise of a fantasized “third way” between idealism and realism, the twist being that they knew this path to be an impossibility. Once again, satire represents a means of acknowledging that one has gone full circle: try as they might, the specter of Wagner hovered high above the fantasy of French Wagnerian fiction and his quadruple musical, lyrical, theatrical and theoretical accomplishments seemed all the more impressive to writers who were unable to compete with him in these domains.

¹⁹ *Wagner's Musical Prose* (19).

²⁰ See Wyzewa, “Notes sur la littérature wagnérienne,” *La Revue wagnérienne* 2 (8 June 1886): 168. Dujardin reprises Wyzewa's vision of literary history in “Richard Wagner et la poésie française contemporaine,” *Revue de Genève* (July 1886): 252-3.

²¹ For more details, see Wyzewa's essay: “Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne et le salon de 1886,” *La Revue wagnérienne* 2 (8 May 1886): 100-13.

2) Belief System: Pessimism/Idealism

When Dujardin undertook the task of summarizing the history of Symbolism and his own contributions to the movement in his 1936 memoir *Mallarmé par un des siens*, he insisted on the fact that he and his Symbolist colleagues saw Wagnerian music and Schopenhauerian thought as a unit. Thus, for the Symbolists, Wagnerian art and the philosophy that had partially inspired it were always linked. Furthermore, these young Wagner enthusiasts were drawn to the special status afforded to music by Schopenhauer, who explained that unlike the other arts, music does not reflect the phenomenal world but rather the Will itself²²:

Or, quel était l'art, libre de tout concept, à qui Schopenhauer avait accordé la puissance d'exprimer le monde de la Volonté ? La musique. C'est pourquoi l'influence de Wagner a été si considérable en 1885 ; Wagner a été d'abord, le truchement par qui la plupart d'entre nous ont pénétré dans Schopenhauer, et, ensuite, le magnifique exemple dépassant tout ce que le vieux philosophe de Francfort pouvait imaginer, et démontrant comment la musique savait être Volonté de Vivre. Délibérément, nous assîmes la poésie sur le trône schopenhauerien de la musique. Et c'est ce qu'on entend lorsque l'on dit que le symbolisme, libérant du servage de l'intellectualisme la poésie, lui a restitué sa valeur musicale. (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 256)

Here Dujardin was indeed correct, since the discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy by French intellectuals coincided with the years of publication of the *Revue wagnérienne*. There, French Wagnerians became acquainted with Schopenhauer through the eyes of Wagner, with the aid of Wyzewa's serialized translation of Wagner's essay *Beethoven* (1871) in May-August 1885.²³ Although Théodule Ribot had begun the work of popularizing Schopenhauer in France with his treatise *Philosophie de Schopenhauer* in 1874, the first complete translation of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* by Auguste Burdeau only appeared in 1885, the year of the *Revue wagnérienne*'s

²² I am paraphrasing an important point made by Schopenhauer in section 52 of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* (262).

²³ On Wagner's idiosyncratic absorption of Schopenhauer's philosophy, see Bryan Magee's *Wagner and Philosophy*.

inception. It is also worthy of note that Barrès and Wyzewa—two key theorists of Symbolism—were among Burdeau's students at Louis-le-Grand.

Valérie Michelet-Jacquod has written further on the topic of Symbolism and its infatuation with German philosophy, whether with Schopenhauer and his pessimist doctrine or the Idealism of Feuerbach, Fichte, Kant and Hegel.²⁴ For one, there was a generational longing to seek an alternative to Positivism which occupied the most prominent position in high-school philosophy curriculums during the early years of the Third Republic and spilled over into the literary world with Naturalist novels.²⁵ Both Decadent and Symbolist writers were seduced by German thinkers in large part because they believed these philosophers had succeeded in touching on inexplicable parts of existence that were all too easily brushed off by the Positivists and the Naturalists. Thus, the Schopenhauerian concept of the Will or the Fichtian definition of subjectivity as self-constituting furnished helpful tools for a generation that dreamed of emphasizing their individuality and eluding a dominant deterministic mindset. This is what Michelet-Jacquod meant when she explained that the Symbolists “s’intéressent à la philosophie germanique moins pour ses aspects mystiques, ou métaphysiques, que pour la place qu’elle accorde à la conscience dans la question de la représentation” (*Le Roman symboliste* 159). If the Naturalists claimed Claude Bernard or Auguste Comte as their role models and wrote elaborate literary paintings documenting every stratum of society, the Symbolists preferred to devote themselves to the exploration of the self and authored narratives heavily reliant on personal experience. Or, to simplify, from the macrostructure of the Naturalist novel, we arrive at the microstructure of the Symbolist novel, which is just as filled with navel-gazing as it is with formal experimentation.

²⁴ See her chapter on Remy de Gourmont in *Le Roman symboliste* (160-4). Gourmont's *Sixtine* (1890) is a prime example for a philosophical novel as it makes multiple allusions to Schopenhauer and Descartes.

²⁵ On that subject, see Sandrine Schiano-Bennis, *La Renaissance de l'idéalisme à la fin du XIXe siècle* (56).

Most writers in this corpus explicitly mentioned these German influences in their work. First, there was Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and his much-commented-on love of Hegel, who made regular appearances in his texts from the 1862 esoteric novel *Isis* to the 1867 short story *Claire Lenoir*. As Alan Raitt has demonstrated, Villiers's Hegelianism was more posture than substance.²⁶ Although he boasted to Mallarmé of having stayed up on many an occasion in order to study Hegel at night, it is more likely that he recycled bits he had gathered from Augusto Vera's popular *Introduction à la philosophie d'Hegel* (1864).²⁷ And yet, according to Raitt, Villiers the Hegelian dilettante was largely responsible for enticing his admirers into the path of German Idealism: “Villiers adopta et propagea un idéalisme intransigeant, basant beaucoup de ses œuvres sur les conséquences qui découlaient de ce système” (*Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* 217). Following his example came Dujardin, who was not well-versed in philosophical matters, yet felt comfortable name-dropping Fichte in an important letter to the Italian journalist Vittorio Pica, where he elaborated on his creative intentions for *Les Lauriers sont coupés*: “quelque chose comme l'idée de Fichte: ‘le moi se pose et s'oppose de non moi’: le sujet crée l'objet, l'âme crée le monde; et toute action est dans l'âme du personnage, tout paysage, suivant l'état d'âme” (quoted in Weissman “Dujardin, le monologue intérieur et Racine” 491). Here he was probably parroting his more philosophically inclined friend Wyzewa, who was just as instrumental as Villiers in popularizing key ideas from German Idealism and reinterpreting them for himself and his colleagues. Among them, it is worth noting 1) a tendency to minimize the external world in order to refocus on the individual psyche and its unique particularities, 2) an emphasis on the ever-

²⁶ See the chapter “L'Hégélianisme” in *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* (217-44).

²⁷ This is speculated about in the second volume of Villiers's complete works in the Pléiade collection. See *Œuvres II* (1133).

changing nature of human consciousness, 3) an extremely misogynistic outlook that permeates all of the works examined in this dissertation.

3) Avant-garde Form vs. Reactionary Politics and Misogyny

On that point, I want to stress the fact that Wyzewa and his Symbolist colleagues are closer in spirit to Schopenhauer and his “Metaphysics of Sexual Love” (1818) than to Wagner, who made sex a key pillar of his philosophy. This privileged position of eroticism in the Wagnerian theoretical edifice was due to its supposed capacity to help human beings transcend their individual limits—in other words, their selfishness—in order to selflessly dedicate themselves to another.²⁸ This is crucial to the plot of the *Ring* cycle, where one man who has renounced love—the dwarf Alberich and later his son Hagen—plots against the man who has found love—Siegfried—in order to cause his downfall. However, for all of his admiration of Schopenhauer, Wagner strayed from the conclusion that sexual impulses are intrinsically nefarious:

Wenn man nun, dieses fest haltend, die wichtige Rolle betrachtet, welche die Geschlechtsliebe in allen ihren Abstufungen und Nuancen (...) nicht minder täglich die verworrensten und schlimmsten Händel anzettelt, die werthvollsten Verhältnisse auflöst, die festesten Bande zerreißt, bisweilen Leben, oder Gesundheit, (..) den bisher Treuen zum Verräther macht, demnach im Ganzen auftritt als ein feindsäliger Dämon, der Alles zu verkehren, zu verwirren und umzuwerfen bemüht ist... (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* Band 2 684)

For all amorousness is rooted in the sexual impulse alone (...) Every day it brews and hatches the worst and most perplexing quarrels and disputes, destroys the most valuable relationships, and breaks the strongest bonds. It demands the sacrifice sometimes of life and health (...) it robs of all conscience those who were previously honorable and upright (...) it appears on the whole as a malevolent demon, striving to pervert, to confuse, and to overthrow everything. (*The World as Will and Representation* Vol. 2 533-4)

²⁸ For more details, see Adrian Daub's introduction to *Tristan's Shadow: Sexuality and the Total Work of Art After Wagner* (1-29).

Repeatedly, the protagonists of the French Wagnerian novels/short stories I analyze in this study seem to confirm Schopenhauer's dark vision of sexuality over Wagner's dream of sexual union as a force for common good. This is most apparent in the treatment of female characters: from Gloriane Gloriani (*Le Roi vierge*) to Léa d'Arsay (*Les Lauriers sont coupés*), love interests are both hyper sexualized and made repulsive by their weaponization of sexuality.²⁹ To this aggressive woman corresponds the virginal archetype that was just as beloved by fin-de-siècle writers, as with Marie in *Valbert*, or Lisi in *Le Roi vierge*. Most strikingly, these two opposites are constantly infantilized and/or bestialized by Symbolist narrators, thus ensuring they remain fundamentally *other*. This alienation is further confirmed by the fact that most of these novels are first-person narratives, or when that is not the case—as in Mendès's *Le Roi vierge*—their point of focus remains with the male characters.

One final issue I have had to consider for this dissertation is the contradiction I have observed between Symbolism's status as avant-garde literary movement and its strident reactionary politics, with misogyny taking center stage in their belief system.³⁰ This is a problem that has been central to the study of Futurism—a school of thought that was iconoclastic before it became increasingly enmeshed in Fascism—but has been less commonly discussed with regard to Symbolism and deserves more scrutiny.³¹ I would like to suggest that Dujardin and Wyzewa's trajectories in particular undercut a naïve assumption that politics and aesthetics should overlap, in the sense that an avant-garde writer ought to be politically progressive. Much like Ezra Pound

²⁹ Villiers's "Le secret de l'ancienne musique" does not feature any female character of significance but he has been known to use the femme fatale archetype elsewhere, as in *L'Ève future* (1886), or "Véra" (1874) in *Contes cruels*.

³⁰ On fin-de-siècle misogyny in the arts, see Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity*. On Nietzsche's masculinist tendencies, see Nancy Sue Love's *Marx, Nietzsche and Modernity*. On Symbolism's misogyny, see the Marie Krysinska chapter in Adrianna Paliyenko's *Genius Envy: Women Shaping French Poetic History, 1801-1900* (227-255).

³¹ On Marinetti's misogyny, Cinzia Sartini Blum brings up multiple contradictions that nuance this straight-forward narrative somewhat. For instance, he advanced the careers of female artists and defended feminist issues of his day such as divorce and equal pay. See *The Other Modernism: F.T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* (2-3).

or F.T. Marinetti, the ground-breaking nature of their art coexists with a highly reactionary streak, a feature they share with Wagner.

An important part of my argument is to emphasize that the Symbolists emulated Wagner's own journey in more ways than one, including in the divide between aesthetic avant-gardism and conservative political views. In sum, both Wagner and the Symbolists exalted modernity while fearing that technological and societal progress might lead to the corruption of modern man. In the case of Wagner, the left-wing revolutionary beliefs from his early years gave way to anti-Semitism and chauvinism.³² And yet, the opposite trajectory is true for his works, which went from conventional Romantic German opera in the mold of Weber to *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, the “consecrated stage feast” of his last music drama *Parsifal*.

With the exception of Mendès, who was Jewish and a proud Republican, Villiers, Dujardin and Wyzewa were all elitists, who thought of themselves as intellectual aristocrats, in other words, as outsiders to the Third Republic and its ideals of meritocracy. Regarding Villiers and Wyzewa, their right-wing views are apparent in their jubilant use of neo-Catholic imagery as well as in their anti-Semitism.³³ With respect to Dujardin, his beliefs seem to have been subject to change, going from passionate support for Pacifism during World War I and concomitant sympathetic writings on Communism to tacit support of Nazi Germany during World War II. But in the 1880s, all three authors frequently lamented the “ravages” of universal suffrage, *laïcité* and the homogenization of class and thought they saw encapsulated in the recently institutionalized motto “Liberté, égalité,

³² Although it bears repeating that the infamous *Das Judenthum in der Musik* was partially written during the Zürich years in 1850 and was published under a pseudonym, before it was expanded upon and republished in Wagner's own name in 1869.

³³ On Villiers's anti-Semitism, see Mireille Dottin-Orsini's “Sur un dérapage antisémite de Villiers” in *Voix de l'écrivain: mélanges offerts à Guy Sagnes* (201-221). In the case of Wyzewa, there are numerous anti-Semitic passages in his personal diary. However, neither of them made anti-Semitism a pillar of their works.

fraternité.” These feelings of loss are more palpable in the preface to Paul Bourget's novel *Le Disciple* (1889) than in the fiction of Dujardin, Wyzewa, or Villiers:

Elle [la jeune bourgeoisie] a vu d'ignobles maîtres d'un jour proscrire au nom de la liberté ses plus chères croyances, des politiciens abominables jouer du suffrage universel comme d'un instrument de règne, et installer leur médiocrité menteuse dans les plus hautes places. Elle l'a subi, ce suffrage universel, la plus monstrueuse et la plus inique des tyrannies,—car la force du nombre est la plus brutale des forces n'ayant même pas pour elle l'audace et le talent. (IV)

Similarly, Wyzewa—a great admirer of Bourget—mocked “le vaste sein protecteur du Suffrage Universel” in an 1886 essay on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (*Nos Maîtres* 137) while Dujardin decried the current state of affairs at republican schools in a text serialized in his *Cahiers idéalistes* in 1927-1928: “La plupart des défauts du caractère français et surtout ses côtés à la fois superficiels et vaniteux, provient du détestable enseignement classique que reçoivent les jeunes gens de la classe moyenne... C'est pourquoi, évidemment, nos républicains de gauche veulent en étendre le bienfait aux classes populaires...” (*Demain, ici, ainsi la Révolution* 26). Such declarations are all indicative of nostalgia for the *ancien régime* and are rather more suitable for members of the arrière- rather than the avant-garde.

How apparent are these reactionary convictions in the *Revue wagnérienne* and the works of fiction examined in this dissertation? The *Revue* was co-founded by Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927), an Englishman who went on to marry into the Wagner family and who is still considered an eminent Wagner expert. Chamberlain had always been an uninhibited anti-Semite—as made obvious in numerous letters from his correspondence with Dujardin that are available at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas—and is now widely considered to be a major intellectual influence on Nazism due to his racist work *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1899), where he defended the notion of the Aryan race's superiority to others. In the 1920s, Chamberlain met Hitler and began a friendship with him that centered on their shared

admiration for Wagner and their hatred of Jews.³⁴ Although Dujardin maintained few of his friendships from the 1880s, he did remain in touch with Chamberlain and published a paean to his memory with the 1943 memoir *Rencontres avec Houston Stewart Chamberlain*, which concludes on an indirect homage to Hitler, at a time when metropolitan France was occupied by the Nazis.

When discussing works from the 1880s, however, it would be anachronistic to speak of Nazism, or mention Chamberlain's dubious racial theories. Instead, one could point to faint traces of these far-right beliefs in the the *Revue wagnérienne*: from Maurice Barrès's occasional presence³⁵, to a passage translated by Wyzewa from Wagner's late treatise *Religion und Kunst* (1880) where he speaks of the cruelty of Jewish law (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 244), to Chamberlain mentioning Wagner's 1850 anti-Semitic pamphlet *Das Judenthum in der Musik* as a work deserving of the French public's attention (*La Revue wagnérienne* 3 276) and a translation of Hans von Wolzogen's nationalistic essay “L'Art aryen” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 70-80). And, of course, one should mention the extraordinary influence of Wyzewa, who elaborated on the modalities of his isolationist worldview in the pages of the *Revue wagnérienne*, claiming that “Seul vit le Moi et seule est sa tâche éternelle: créer” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 169). One can easily spot how such an aphorism may lead to the exclusion of anyone but the self, with the occasional tolerance of like-minded male friends. Like Narcissus in his doomed love for Echo, Wyzewa was all too aware of the real-life misery induced by such uncompromising views and longed for a sense of normalcy. His personal ambivalence towards the more concrete consequences of his idealism—from personal solitude to financial difficulties and artistic marginalization—is also constitutive of Symbolism and represents an important thread for this dissertation. With characters like Frédéric

³⁴ For more information, see Ian Kershaw's biography of Hitler, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris, Volume 1* (139 and 151).

³⁵ A letter of Barrès from Bayreuth for *Le Voltaire* was republished by the *Revue*. See *La Revue wagnérienne* 2: 307-8. In addition, Wyzewa praised an important article by Barrès entitled “L'esthétique de demain: l'art suggestif” (*De Nieuwe Gids* October 1885) in the November 1885 issue of *La Revue wagnérienne* 1: 298.

of Bavaria (*Le Roi vierge*), the old *Chapeau-Chinois* virtuoso (“Le secret de l'ancienne musique”), Daniel Prince (*Les Lauriers sont coupés*) and Valbert (*Valbert*), the more unsavory repercussions of that ivory-tower mentality are illustrated in vivid detail and will be expounded upon in individual chapters.

For now, I propose to offer a refresher on the state of French Wagnerism in the 1860s which shall serve as a transition toward the Mendès/Villiers chapter. It is my hope that this historical primer will be helpful in order for the reader to understand just how French Wagnerism of the 1880s differed from the previous generation's efforts. With chapter 1, I will further establish how Mendès and Villiers represented a point of juncture between two separate modes of engaging with Wagner, attempting as they did to perform an exegesis of Wagnerian works before they endeavored to reinterpret Wagnerian theories for their creative benefit.

Prologue Wagnerism in the 1860s

“J’ai fait jadis le coup de poing,
Pour Wagner alors point au point...”
(Paul Verlaine, “Épigramme XX” 57)

The Paris *Tannhäuser* Fiasco

The scene has oft been told: on the evening of March 13, 1861, Richard Wagner's grand ambitions of a Parisian coronation came crashing once hisses, snickers, mocking remarks and whistles greeted the premiere of his *Tannhäuser* at the Paris Opéra's Salle Le Peletier.¹ As was his custom, Wagner was quick to retell the tale in a favorable light, recasting himself as a musical vanguard rejected with unjust vehemence by a conservative French public.² In his autobiography, *Mein Leben*, he laid most of the blame on the members of the then-powerful Jockey Club, a group of aristocratic gentlemen who exerted great pressure on him to place a ballet in the middle of his opera just so they could take a peek at the ballerinas' legs. Moreover, as legitimists, they also wanted to object to the emperor's open support of Wagner and used the Opéra as a political battleground where their views could be heard.³

The second performance on March 18 was just as disastrous, with the manager Royer crying: “Ce sont les Jockeys, nous sommes perdus” to an alarmed Wagner (*Mein Leben* 2 750).

¹ For more colorful details, see Therese Dolan's chapter “Wagner and Paris, the Music of the Future” in *Manet, Wagner, and the Musical Culture of Their Time*, 30-43; as well as Gerald D. Turbow's “Wagnerism in France” in *Wagnerism, Culture and Politics* (147-151).

² Annegret Fauser nuances the Wagnerian narrative very convincingly: “Although the political circumstances and Wagner's own refusal to compromise certainly contributed to the rejection of *Tannhäuser*, its core challenge to the Opéra rested in the work itself. Critics whose aesthetic position held up the tradition of French and Italian opera had no choice but to condemn this kind of music of the future lest they jeopardize the true future of a genre which was the nation's image.” See “‘Cette musique sans tradition’: Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and its French Critics,” (253).

³ The Austrian Princess Pauline von Metternich, one of Wagner's most influential Parisian allies, officially requested that the composer's works be played at the Opéra. In order to please both her and Austria, Napoléon III issued a decree in favor of Wagner that granted him an unlimited spending account at the Opéra. Subsequently, Wagner's republican friends—like Juliette Adam—felt betrayed by his alliance with the emperor. See Turbow (147).

Indeed, the Jockey members meant business, having seemingly plotted an organized cabal against the composer. By the third and last rendition of *Tannhäuser*, which Wagner purposefully scheduled on a Sunday—that is, on a day when subscribers usually did not show and the audience was made of less wealthy people—they came back with dog whistles for the *coup de grâce*. This was the moment Wagner chose to bow out and leave the French capital, signing off with a bitter open letter to Royer: “Maintenant que la vivacité de l'opposition qui lui est faite [à mon ouvrage] ne permet pas à ceux des spectateurs qui voudraient l'entendre d'y donner l'attention nécessaire pour l'apprécier, je n'ai d'autre ressource honorable que de le retirer” (*Le Ménestrel*, March 31, 1861). In essence, due to the tumult caused by disgruntled operagoers and critics of all stripes, *Tannhäuser* was not properly *heard* in Paris.⁴

Consequently, since the music had been submerged by the crowd's noise, the Wagner who had been so emphatically opposed by both the Parisian public and the critics was not the musician but more of a construct based on his reputation. As Annegret Fauser explains, even before the premiere of *Tannhäuser*, Wagner had already attracted many negative *a priori*s thanks to his arrogant conduct during rehearsals and the messianic complex so apparent in the treatise *Lettre sur la musique* (1860), where he declared his desire to reform opera as a genre and offended many French music critics in the process.⁵ The need for radical change Wagner exposed in the *Lettre* was based on his viewing the Opéra as a locus of decadence or “une institution dont la destination spéciale est presque exclusivement d’offrir une distraction et un amusement à une population aussi ennuyée qu’avide de plaisir ; (...) [et] de viser au résultat pécuniaire pour faire face aux dépenses

⁴ Therese Dolan reports that: “The starring tenor Albert Neimann had to stop singing so often because the noise in the audience drowned out the music that he seemed more like a figure in a *tableau vivant* than a performer in the opera. He became so angry that he threw his pilgrim's hat at the raucous audience and was forced to apologize to the emperor for the disrespect manifested in his presence” (*Manet, Wagner, and the Musical Culture of Their Time* 33).

⁵ See Fauser: “From a Parisian standpoint, Wagner made one tactical mistake after another during the lead-up to the premiere, gambling away any general goodwill toward the controversial musician of the future” (239).

que nécessite l'appareil pompeux qui a tant d'attrait..." (181-182). Such attacks were not taken kindly by the Parisian music community, who perceived them as a German threat to the French establishment. Taking Wagner at his word, they did not need to listen to his music to be convinced that his agenda was at odds with their own.

The same lack of knowledge with regard to Wagner's music was also true for the French poets who had embraced him between the 1850s and 1860s. As a matter of fact, neither Nerval, Baudelaire or Champfleury were ever treated to a full performance of a Wagnerian music drama, but that did not prevent them from advocating for Wagner's merits in the press.⁶ Often seen as a precursor to the *Revue wagnérienne*, the short-lived Parnassian literary journal *Revue fantaisiste* (1861) was a case in point. Headed by the nineteen-year-old poet Catulle Mendès (1841-1909), it listed Wagner's name among those of Banville, Baudelaire, Champfleury or Gautier on its back covers, although Wagner never published anything there.⁷ Regardless of the music, what mattered to Mendès and his colleagues was that Wagner was a brother in arms on the side of modernity.

This brief column by Mendès from April 1, 1861 succeeds in conveying a sense of both the ear-splitting noise that filled the auditorium of the Opéra one month prior and the deafening critical conversation surrounding the true artistic merits of Wagner's music:

Nous regrettons que l'abondance des matières ne nous permette pas de raconter les trois batailles qui se sont livrées à l'occasion du *Tannhæuser*.

La défaite de Richard Wagner a été complète. Les critiques ont été unanimes à proclamer la chute de ce musicien oseur, *trébuché de si haut*. Cette unanimité, si rare par les feuilletonistes qui courent, pourrait faire croire à un parti pris. On a sifflé l'œuvre de Wagner, mais on ne l'a pas jugée ; on ne veut plus l'entendre, mais on ne l'a pas écoutée. (*La Revue fantaisiste* 255)

⁶ In a forthcoming article entitled "Wagner and French Poetry from Nerval to Mallarmé: The Power of Opera Unheard," Peter Dayan argues that none of the French poets who wrote about Wagner in the 1850s and 1860s had properly heard his music. If Nerval was too sick to attend the Weimar performance of *Lohengrin* and had to rely on Liszt's notes in order to write his review, Baudelaire and others only saw the Paris *Tannhäuser* and were prevented from hearing the music due to the audience covering both voices and orchestra with their clamor.

⁷ Mendès did try to recruit Wagner as a contributor but failed. See his recollection of their first meeting in Paris in the obituary he wrote for Wagner in *Gil Blas* where he portrays the composer as a man who had reached the "dernier degré de l'exaspération nerveuse ; un chat en colère, hérissé, toutes griffes dehors !" (February 16, 1883).

The litotes in italics “trébuché de si haut” is reminiscent of Wagner's own assessment of the Paris debacle as a fall of mythological proportions. In a letter to Victor Cochinat dated March 25, the composer seemed haunted by Icarus-like images of collapse, invoking “la chute de *Tannhäuser*” before mentioning his own, which he portrayed as a tragic one underscored by the taunting songs of the everyman or the “badauds du boulevard” (*Lettres françaises* 84). Later in the letter, he claimed to be a victim of fate: “Mais ma chute était voulue, voulue” (Idem). This fatalistic outlook on the *Tannhäuser* fiasco is significant; it derives from Wagner's growing chauvinism, which manifested itself in the belief in a fundamental incompatibility between his Germanness and the French public's tastes. As Manuela Schwartz has argued, the Paris *Tannhäuser* was indeed an event of great magnitude in Wagner's ideological trajectory due to the fact that it turned the “cosmopolitan” artist into an ardent German nationalist.⁸

However, as we are about to see, this version of events was not quite shared by Wagner's French admirers. Instead, they welcomed the opportunity of taking part in the greatest aesthetic *âgon* of their generation and showed little concern for national differences. Having substituted Victor Hugo's *Hernani* for Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, their main interest lay in defending revolutionary aesthetic principles. Mendès was one such progressive artist who made it a point of honor to champion the Wagnerian cause ever since he had attended a concert of orchestral excerpts at the Théâtre-Italien in 1860.⁹ His enthusiasm for Wagner, he clarified twenty years after the fact, was shared by other Parnassians in a manner congruous with their elitist aesthetics: “Que voulez-vous ? Les Parnassiens ont toujours été des gens fort étranges, et c'est une de leurs manies les plus invétérées que de chercher, de découvrir, d'admirer, d'exalter, un peu avant les autres, et lorsqu'il

⁸ See *Wagner-Rezeption und französische Oper des Fin-de-Siècle, Untersuchungen zu Vincent d'Indy's Fervaal* (6).

⁹ These concerts took place in January/February 1860 and were attended by the likes of Meyerbeer, Gounod, Berlioz, Champfleury and Baudelaire. Conversations during the intermission were so heated as to inspire rumors of a brawl in the nearby passage Choiseul. See, for instance, Gustave Héquet's review for *L'Illustration* from February 4, 1860.

y a encore quelque péril à le faire, l'audacieux génie des novateurs” (*La Légende du Parnasse contemporain* 95-6). Nevertheless, it took him until the 1880s to write about Wagner outside of occasional music reviews. And, by then, emphasizing the “danger” inherent to his early backing of Wagner was a convenient way for Mendès to underline his long-term artistic credibility and bestow a prophetic image upon himself.

This desideratum transpires in his retrospective account of the *Tannhäuser* premiere, where he took great care to emphasize his proximity to Baudelaire, who had since passed away and become lionized:

Je songe malgré moi aux représentations de *Tannhæuser* à l'Académie impériale de musique. Cris, sifflets, huées. Loges qui s'insurgent, galeries qui se pâment de rire derrière l'éventail, fauteuils d'orchestre qui bondissent de colère (...) Je me vois dans un coin de la salle, frémissant d'indignation, car les concerts de Richard Wagner, au théâtre des Italiens, m'avaient déjà conquis à ce qu'on appelait alors la musique de l'avenir, essayant d'imposer silence à mes voisins, et, quand la tempête se calmait un instant, saisissant dans l'orchestre et sur la scène d'incomparables beautés musicales et poétiques. À quelques stalles de la mienne était assis Charles Baudelaire. Du regard nous nous disions quelquefois l'un à l'autre tout ce que nous inspirait de colère et aussi de pitié la rage démente de la foule. (*Richard Wagner* 89-91)

Baudelaire and Mendès, we are told, were isolated in their silent righteousness, which stood in stark contrast to the mad roaring of the unenlightened crowd. In yet another version of the same evening, Mendès specified that this outward show of dignity did not prevent the two poets from getting physical in their disapproval of their compatriots' behavior: “en 1861, Charles Baudelaire et moi fîmes le coup de poing contre les siffleurs; je me rappelle même avoir reçu certaines bourrades que je rendis avec usure” (*L'Écho de Paris*, May 6, 1893). If we are to believe Mendès, in 1861, supporting Wagner had to be done just as much with the fist as with the pen. Indeed, it was a glamorous cause.

Unlike Mendès, Baudelaire did not waste time in endorsing the so-called “music of the future” both privately and in the press, to the point that he told Poulet-Malassis “Je n’ose plus

parler de Wagner; on s'est trop foutu de moi" (*Correspondance* I 670-671). For all his reluctance to discuss Wagner further, however, his Wagnerian texts are often mentioned as foundational works of French Wagnerism. In a letter to Wagner penned in February 1860, after attending the Théâtre-Italien, Baudelaire launched into a candid description of the dual lyrical and sensual transport he underwent at the concert hall—"Je vous dois *la plus grande jouissance musicale que j'aie jamais éprouvée*"—and admitted aesthetic defeat at the hands of the music: "Par vous j'ai été vaincu tout de suite. Ce que j'ai éprouvé est indescriptible, et si vous daignez ne pas rire, j'essaierai de vous le traduire" (*Correspondance* I 672).¹⁰ According to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, the ensuing essay "Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris" (1861) consolidates Baudelaire's artistic subjugation (*Musica Ficta* 58). In this logic, the very fact that Baudelaire chose to begin the text with an assertion of his subjective voice is telling; it means he was cognizant of the fact that his poetic translation of Wagner's music was inherently personal, not universal, and thus failed to capture the phenomenon in its entirety: "qu'il me soit permis (...) de parler souvent en mon nom personnel. Ce *Je*, accusé justement d'impertinence dans beaucoup de cas, implique cependant une grande modestie ; il enferme l'écrivain dans les limites les plus strictes de la sincérité" (*Œuvres complètes* II 779). The rest of the text stages the poet's simultaneous search for positive meanings in the music—as illustrated by the pseudo-scientific juxtaposition of paraphrases on the prelude of *Lohengrin* by Liszt, Berlioz and Baudelaire himself—and his understanding that such a pursuit can only be a lure.

Baudelaire's back-and-forth dance on the question of musical meaning has been defined by Peter Dayan as "telling us music can say something specific" while also "allow[ing] us to read the opposite message: that which music translates can only acquire a positive meaning through the

¹⁰ Laurence Dreyfus describes Baudelaire's letter as the first French text by a serious author to "notice Wagner's erotics—and hear their peculiar echoes..." (*Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* 17).

operation of the individual imagination; it has none in itself” (*Music Writing Literature* 32). This fundamental ambiguity was to reappear with Mallarmé, who wrote of his fascination with Wagner while criticizing his aesthetic project in his essay for the *Revue wagnérienne* “Rêverie d'un poète français” (1885). My contention is that a similar conflict between the yearning for meaning and the recognition of ineffable absolutes partly begets the ironic tone used by the four writers featured in this study. Indeed, from Mendès to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam to Dujardin and Wyzewa, all of their works of Wagnerian fiction from the 1880s—roughly speaking—show a degree of light mockery towards Wagner that did not just stem from “anxiety of influence” or a desire to affirm their French *esprit* in reaction to Wagner's German nationalist aesthetics. If Baudelaire had implored Wagner “not to laugh” at his poetic translation of the musical excerpts he heard in 1860 at the Théâtre-Italien, these four authors seemingly ask us the opposite, daring us to acknowledge the absurdity of the verbal encapsulating of the Wagnerian experience.

Judith Gautier: The True Believer

In French Wagnerism of the 1860s, satirizing Wagner and his music was not the norm. At the time, the necessity to defend Wagner against personal attacks was too pressing and the composer's actions had not yet turned his French devotees against him. This type of advocacy was exemplified by the novelist and critic Judith Gautier (1845-1917), who distinguished herself from her peers by carrying it over into the next decades, remaining steadfast in her refusal to poke slight fun at Wagner or reinterpret his theories according to her personal ideology.¹¹ In doing so, she

¹¹ None of her novels, however, deal with Wagnerian themes. Gautier's writing on Wagner include the first important study of his works in the French language, *Richard Wagner et son oeuvre poétique* (1882), and a translation of *Parsifal* (1893) to which Wagner himself contributed. It was later republished in 1914 with an appendix, “Histoire d'une collaboration.”

prefigured the cult-like worship of Wagner in the “temple” of Bayreuth.¹² The daughter of Théophile Gautier and of the Italian opera singer Ernesta Grisi, she received a thorough education that included being tutored in Mandarin and taking piano lessons. Early on, she was enthralled by German music and prized it above all others. As she recalls in her autobiography, *Le Second Rang du collier* (1903), it was while sight-reading Weber's *Aufforderung zum Tanz* (*Invitation to the Dance*) that she became convinced of her love of music and sought out more German scores in contrast with “les volumes de musique assez frivole, qui composaient la bibliothèque de ma mère” (119). Another anecdote from the same book foreshadows her courage and unwavering militancy for the Wagnerian cause. At age fifteen, as the *Tannhäuser* controversy was swirling in the Parisian intelligentsia even before the premiere, she did not hesitate to strike a powerful “enemy” who crossed her path outside of the Opéra:

Il assistait à la répétition qui avait soulevé un tumulte indescriptible : on avait sifflé à outrance. Cela lui causait une joie féroce et il parlait avec une violence haineuse. Je le regardai (...) Je ne sais quel sentiment me poussa à sortir tout à coup du mutisme et de la réserve que mon âge m'imposait, pour m'écrier, avec une impertinence incroyable :
 – On voit bien que vous parlez d'un confrère ! Et il s'agit, sans doute, d'un chef-d'œuvre ! Mon père, ébahi, me gronda, tout haut, mais en riant, tout bas.
 – Qui est-ce ? demandai-je quand le monsieur fut parti.
 – Hector Berlioz.¹³ (173)

A little further, Gautier explained the significance of the incident for her, taking it as a sign of her future devotion to a god-like man she saw as the victim of prejudice: “une sorte de pressentiment, dans ce mouvement de colère, dans ma promptitude à défendre ce Richard Wagner, qui devait m'inspirer un jour un tel enthousiasme...” (174). By her own admission, she felt herself called for

¹² The Bayreuth Festspielhaus was inaugurated in August 1876 with the premiere of the complete *Ring* cycle. For a history of the Festival, consult Frederic Spotts's *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival*.

¹³ The relationship between Berlioz and Wagner was more complex than what Judith Gautier would have us believe since it was more of an ambivalent friendship than an all-out enmity. For more, see Katherine Kolb, “Flying Leaves: Between Berlioz and Wagner,” *19th-Century Music* (33-1): 25-61.

the task of converting her fellow literati to Wagner's merits with a zeal that was almost religious in its intensity.¹⁴

For Judith Gautier was not just an admirer of Wagner. She deified the composer to an extent that not even Champfleury or Baudelaire would indulge in—despite their lavish words of praise—and heavily romanticized her role as a Wagnerian propagandist, a function she envisaged as the one of a missionary spreading the gospel to the uneducated masses. This much she expressed in depicting herself as an apostle sitting by Jesus:

Il est bien évident que toujours, en même temps qu'un homme de génie, il naît un petit groupe d'élus, appelés à le comprendre, à former autour de lui ce bataillon dévoué qui doit le défendre, le consoler de la haine universelle et le soutenir, dans sa montée au Golgotha, en lui affirmant sa divinité.

J'avais déjà la prescience que ma destinée était de prendre rang, un jour, parmi cette milice sacrée, qui combattait pour le triomphe de Richard Wagner. (178-179)

Certainly, Wagner himself indulged in the rhetoric of martyrdom and frequently appropriated Christian symbolism to narrate his own trajectory, as Nicholas Vazsonyi has shown.¹⁵ And the fact that a beautiful Frenchwoman of high artistic lineage such as Judith Gautier was willing to play the part of the self-sacrificing woman Wagner repeatedly invoked in his own works—from Senta who redeems the Dutchman with her suicide in *Der fliegende Holländer* to Kundry who washes the protagonist's feet in *Parsifal*—was not lost on him.

In 1866, Judith Gautier married her fellow Wagnerite Catulle Mendès, a move that deeply angered her father who was quick to nickname her spouse “Crapule m'embête.”¹⁶ As regular

¹⁴ In *Le Troisième Rang du collier* from 1909 (republished as *Visites à Richard Wagner*), she pushes the metaphor further with a hint of self-deprecation with respect to her youthful fanaticism: “Nous avons le fanatisme de sectaires, prêts au martyre, et, plus encore, à l'égorgement des adversaires. Il eût certes été impossible de nous convaincre que l'anéantissement des aveugles à cette beauté nouvelle n'était pas parfaitement légitime” (16).

¹⁵ See *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*, 26-29. Champfleury was perhaps one of the first French writers to parrot Wagner's own vision of his life and work: “Je cherche et je ne trouve nulle part de martyre comparable à celui de Wagner” (*Richard Wagner* 15).

¹⁶ “Gautier, en bon père de famille, prend quelques renseignements sur le futur, et ces renseignements ne sont pas bons. À Paris, dans les cercles d'habitues, on tient Catulle pour un noceur de première catégorie (...) En plus, Catulle est juif” (Anne Boquel and Etienne Kern, *Une histoire des haines d'écrivains* 40).

attendees of Jules Pasdeloup's Concerts populaires at the Cirque d'hiver, the couple was deeply immersed in the belligerent atmosphere surrounding Wagnerian music at the time: "Chaque dimanche, quand Pasdeloup jouait 'du Wagner,' il y avait, dans l'enceinte du Cirque, des défis homériques entre les deux camps adverses, et le municipal devait, bien souvent, s'interposer pour arrêter les combats" (*Visites à Richard Wagner* 16). In their longing to become better acquainted with Wagner's music, they eventually traveled to Baden-Baden in order to watch *Lohengrin* in full in September 1868.

In the wake of the performance, Judith Gautier published a music review for *La Presse* that is noteworthy in its biting wit and uncompromising adherence to the composer's aesthetics. If the very first lines attest to a similar capitulation as the one undergone by Baudelaire seven years earlier, Gautier differentiated herself from other French Wagnerians by relentlessly disparaging Wagner's critics in a manner redolent of her father's aggressiveness against philistines in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835):

Le génie est un despote auquel, tôt ou tard, il faut se soumettre. Recliner à l'obéissance, c'est-à-dire à l'admiration, n'est qu'un effort stérile et qu'une perte de temps. Cédons aux forts ; c'est obligatoire et juste ; dans l'art, ceux qui ont la force ont le droit. Quand surgit un homme comme Richard Wagner, il s'empare de la gloire comme un souverain du trône qu'il mérite. Ceux qui tentent de la lui disputer, accroissent son triomphe de leur défaite. (*La Presse*, September 8, 1868)

Insofar as Gautier and other French Wagnerites believed that Wagner had been unfairly humiliated in Paris, one of their deepest desires was to wash away this national disgrace with an outstanding theatrical success. Gautier was therefore a bit rash in proclaiming that *Lohengrin*'s triumph at a German opera house near the French border meant that Wagner's fortunes were to change in her native country: "Or Bade, en ce moment, c'est Paris. Paris a donc racheté sa triste conduite d'autrefois, et désormais l'auteur de *Lohengrin* sera populaire en France. Que ce succès importe à Richard Wagner, nous ne le croyons pas" (Idem). Not everyone agreed: in his competing review

of the Baden-Baden *Lohengrin*, the French composer Ernest Reyer said quite the opposite, describing “une brillante compagnie de sportsmen et de touristes français” falling victim to “somnolence et (...) ennui” (*Journal des débats*, September 30, 1868). In essence, Gautier's youthful idealism made her somewhat blind to the realities of the audience's reactions and the pace at which the greatness of Wagner's music was to become self-evident to French listeners. And she certainly could not have foretold that the looming events of the Franco-Prussian war were to set back the clock of Wagner's acceptance in France by an additional twenty years due to the publication of Wagner's anti-French vaudeville *Eine Kapitulation* (1871) to which many—including Mendès—took offense.¹⁷

Reyer's tepid approval of the music and his criticism of Wagner's ambitions as unoriginal—which echoed other French music critics' reproach that Wagner was merely rehashing Gluck's operatic reform—upset Gautier to the point that she felt compelled to write a two-part rebuttal. Although Reyer was friendly with her father and was certainly not anti-Wagnerian by any means, Gautier seized this opportunity to make her deference to Wagner clear.¹⁸ Once again, the first lines of her article “Richard Wagner et la critique” are heavily polemical: “Lorsque certaine critique a trouvé une fois une stupidité bien épaisse, bien complète prouvant surabondamment son ignorance, sa mauvaise foi, son mauvais goût, elle s’y accroche et s’y cramponne avec une rare ardeur. Que d’absurdités ont été débitées à tort et à travers sur la musique de Wagner !” (*La Presse*, October 17, 1868). Yet, past this initial vehemence, she delivered some nuanced observations on Wagner's music and the content of his libretti—including a thorough examination of the commonalities and

¹⁷ For more on the controversy surrounding *Eine Kapitulation*, see Thomas S. Grey's “*Eine Kapitulation*: Aristophanic Operetta as Cultural Warfare in 1870,” in *Richard Wagner and His World* (2009).

¹⁸ Ernest Reyer was to be the author of a successful opera based on the *Nibelungenlied* entitled *Sigurd* (1883). For more information, see Steven Huebner's chapter on *Sigurd* in *French Opera at the Fin De Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (178-194).

divergences between Gluck and Wagner—that helped position her as a prominent Wagnerite because of how well-informed she was.¹⁹ And her greatest asset as a Wagnerian educator was her ability to condense some of Wagner's most challenging ideas into metaphors that are almost tangible in their simplicity, a method that was to reappear—oftentimes with less brio—in the pages of the *Revue wagnérienne*. In “Richard Wagner et la critique,” it is apparent in her likening of Wagner's “endless melody” to a stream, an observation that seems to anticipate Dujardin's invention of the interior monologue in *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887) and the birth of stream-of-consciousness narrative.

Rather boldly, Gautier sent an admiring letter to Wagner along with her three articles for *La Presse*. This was the beginning of a correspondence that led to Wagner's personal invitation to visit him and his family in Tribschen.²⁰ Subsequent to her 1869 and 1870 summer visits, Judith Gautier and Richard Wagner became close friends and began an emotional affair by the late 1870s, at a time during which Gautier was separated from Mendès.²¹ Although Gautier has long been rumored to be Wagner's mistress, it seems as if she was not romantically inclined towards Wagner, perhaps out of loyalty to Cosima.²² It is unfortunate that her relationship with the composer—which was only revealed in the 1930s once their private letters were unveiled—has since eclipsed her insightful writings on his works, a story all too common for female artists who were intimate

¹⁹ Only her summary of the recently premiered *Meistersinger* strikes the reader as inaccurate. In his response to her articles, Wagner noticed Gautier's unfamiliarity with his new work and summarized it for her. See *Lettres à Judith Gautier par Richard et Cosima Wagner* (39-41).

²⁰ This invitation was certainly a privilege and made all the more so since Wagner lived a reclusive lifestyle in Tribschen because of the scandal triggered by his having merged households with the still-married Cosima von Bülow (née Liszt) in 1868. Cosima was to officially divorce Hans von Bülow in 1870 and marry Wagner the same year.

²¹ Mendès was a notorious philanderer and eventually left Gautier for the Irish-born composer Augusta Holmès, herself friendly with the Wagners, in 1874. Judith Gautier and Catulle Mendès did not manage to officially divorce until 1896.

²² Léon Guichard, who compiled a volume of Judith Gautier's correspondence with the Wagners, explains: “Comment interpréter les mots, les allusions, les expressions ? Soyons prudents. Des amants peuvent s'écrire des lettres qui ne laissent rien soupçonner de leurs relations ; et des êtres qui ne se sont jamais appartenus et ne s'appartiendront jamais peuvent s'écrire des épîtres enflammées. (...) Ce sont plutôt des lettres de détente et de désir, d'excitation dans l'espace et le temps. Cette passion fut en grande partie cérébrale” (23-24). Bettina Knapp confirms: “it is claimed that Wagner's passionate outpourings embarrassed her” (*Judith Gautier: Writer, Orientalist, Musicologist, Feminist* 128).

with great men.²³

At any rate, Judith Gautier had yet to meet Wagner in 1869 and contented herself with the task of writing another article in support of *Rienzi*'s impending premiere at the Théâtre-Lyrique. Once again, she showed her gift for educational metaphors, this time with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which she compared to a beaming sun:

Plus de heurts, plus de vides entre les parties homogènes de la même œuvre ; tout se tient, tout se noue, tout s'enchaîne ; il n'y a même pas de transitions visibles, tant les innombrables rayonnements émanent évidemment d'un même centre lumineux ; et le spectateur attentif d'un drame lyrique exécuté selon ce noble système sort du théâtre profondément dominé par l'obsession puissante de l'impression que le poète-musicien a voulu lui communiquer. (*La Liberté*, April 7, 1869)

A few months later, she and Mendès succeeded in convincing a couple of newspapers to sponsor a summer trip to Germany under the pretense of reporting back on the International Art Exhibition in Munich. At the same time, they planned on visiting Wagner and his family in Tribschen near Luzern in Switzerland, before attending the premiere of *Das Rheingold* in Munich. Accompanied by their close friend Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, they set forth on their train journey and arrived in Tribschen by mid-July. The next chapter examines the three competing versions of their stay with Wagner before launching into a close analysis of Mendès's novel *Le Roi vierge* (1881) and a short story from Villiers's *Contes cruels* (1883) entitled "Le secret de l'ancienne musique." In my dual investigation of Mendès and Villiers's fiction, I shall demonstrate that both authors underwent a similar creative malaise vis-à-vis Wagner: while the first repeatedly exorcised his simultaneous fascination for the music and contempt for the man in his fiction, the other chose to say very little of Wagner in an attempt to remain silent on the subject of the absolute.

²³ With the exception of Bettina Knapp's book-length study, *Judith Gautier: Writer, Orientalist, Musicologist, Feminist* (2004); and Véronique Chagnon-Burke's 2013 chapter "Tel père, telle fille: Judith Gautier, Artist, Author, and Art Critic" in *Women Art Critics in Nineteenth-Century France*, both of which attempt to do justice to the breadth of Gautier's output as a critic. However, neither of them focuses specifically on the question of Gautier's Wagnerism and her later difficulty in detaching her music criticism from her personal connection to Wagner.

Chapter 1
The Aesthetics of Hyberbole:
Mendès and Villiers's Personal Encounter with Wagner

“Prosterne-toi tant que tu voudras,
 au seuil du Vénusberg ou de la Walhalla...”
 (Léon Bloy, *La Femme pauvre* 211)

The opening of the Bayreuth Festival in 1876 was not just a personal victory for Wagner but also an international event made possible by the advent of the modern railway system in Western Europe and a years-long advertising campaign.¹ It inaugurated a new era of artistic pilgrimages to Bavaria for both German and foreign music lovers, their travels being documented in private letters, music reviews and travel books. But there is another aspect of the Bayreuth experience that has remained somewhat underexplored: the novel of pilgrimage, a sub-genre of Wagnerian literature which either takes place in Bayreuth entirely or devotes a few pages to the Festival. On the French side, writers as diverse as Joséphin Péladan, Teodor de Wyzewa and Élémir Bourges all tried their hand at describing their own Bayreuth adventures under the guise of fiction with their novels *La Victoire du mari* (1889), *Valbert* (1893) and *Le Crépuscule des dieux* (1884).² Although their style and tone differ greatly, they all testify to the duality of the French pilgrim's time in Bayreuth: being, on the one hand, exhilarated by the music and unique conditions in which it was played at the Festspielhaus while taking notice of the less than pious behavior of fellow concertgoers on the other.

My contention is that these fictional travel writings from the 1880s and 1890s did not come out of a vacuum but built on an existing tradition of music reviews by French poets who had been

¹ For more details, see Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (172-176).

² Cécile Leblanc's *Wagnérisme et création 1883-1889* dedicates one chapter to Péladan (323-352) and another to Bourges (207-239). On Wyzewa's *Valbert*, see my third chapter. Other books belonging to the sub-genre include Colette's *Claudine s'en va* (1903) and Augustine Bulteau's *La Lueur sur la cime* (1904), which was published under the pseudonym of Jacque Vontade.

dispatched to German opera houses as one-time correspondents and thus prepared the ground for the Wagnerian cult to take over avant-garde poetic circles in Paris. The first one was Gérard de Nerval who released a series of articles for *La Presse* between September 9 and October 1, 1850 on the premiere of *Lohengrin* in Weimar.³ Then, in 1857, Théophile Gautier made the trip to Wiesbaden to hear *Tannhäuser* and wrote a positive review for *Le Moniteur universel* in which he expressed his desire to see the work presented on the Parisian stage.⁴ But none of these celebrated writers made much use of their creative talents in their accounts of what they had heard in Germany. Since they were addressing themselves to the uninitiated, they prioritized summarizing the plots and clarifying some of Wagner's dramatic intentions over subjective musings.

It took until 1869 for the next generation of authors—Judith Gautier, Catulle Mendès and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam—to have a go at narrating their own Wagner-motivated journey in writing, only this time they visited Wagner himself in Tribschen before attending the premiere of *Das Rheingold* in Munich.⁵ The various texts that came out of their stay in Switzerland and their subsequent trip to Bavaria, I posit, marked the beginnings of the Wagnerian pilgrimage sub-genre in French literature. As a matter of fact, Judith Gautier was one of the first French writers to mention the concept by name in her article “Sur le lac de Constance”: “Nous aimions cette contrée comme une patrie intellectuelle; un nom sublime semblait comme resplendir au-dessus d'elle, et c'était un fervent pèlerinage artistique qui nous conduisait vers sa capitale” (*La Liberté* October 7,

³ Unfortunately, Nerval missed the performance due to sickness and had to rely on his friend Franz Liszt's notes in order to write his review, as noted by Alan Walker in *Franz Liszt: the Weimar years, 1848-1861* (125). Nerval's text was later republished in the *Revue wagnérienne* of February 1887.

⁴ The review was published in *Le Moniteur universel* in the September 29, 1857 issue.

⁵ Mendès published a two-part article entitled “L'Or du Rhin” in *Le National* (September 5 and 6, 1869) while Villiers published his “Théâtre de Munich” in *L'Universel* (September 21, 1869). Judith Gautier was once again the most prolific of the three. Her articles for *La Liberté* (August 7, 1869, August 24, 1869 and October 7, 1869) and *Le Rappel* (August 3, 1869) contain anecdotes that were to make their way into her later book *Le Troisième Rang du collier* (1909). Her review of *Das Rheingold* was published in *Le Rappel* on September 7, 1869. All of these texts have been reprinted in Luc-Henri Roger's *Les Voyageurs de l'Or du Rhin: La réception française de la création munichoise du Rheingold de Richard Wagner à l'été 1869*.

1869). Although Villiers only released one article on the *Rheingold* and Mendès and Gautier waited decades to publish books describing their Wagnerian sojourn—in a Tribschen chapter belonging to Mendès's collection of essays *Richard Wagner* (1886) and in Gautier's scrupulously detailed Wagnerian memoirs *Le Troisième Rang du collier* (1909)—their anecdotes likely circulated widely in Wagnerian circles.⁶ A few memories from Tribschen also made it to the pages of the *Revue wagnérienne*, for instance, in Dujardin's review of Catulle Mendès's *Richard Wagner* (June 1886) and in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's rather fanciful “Souvenir” (June 1887).

Coincidentally, Wagner had preceded them in writing the story of a younger artist undertaking a pilgrimage to his favorite composer's home. In the short story “Une visite à Beethoven: épisode de la vie d'un musicien allemand”—republished in German as *Eine Pilgerfahrt zu Beethoven* (A Pilgrimage to Beethoven)—a composer named R. succeeds in obtaining Beethoven's blessing after a short but dramatic conversation, where he promises to write an opera that will take the lessons from the *Ninth Symphony* further. Since “Une visite” was first published in French in the *Revue et gazette musicale* in 1840, it is plausible that either Gautier or Mendès were familiar with it. As it happens, the parallels with their own visit are legion: as devoted admirers of Wagner, they came to Tribschen in hopes of securing the more established artist's friendship and approval; with Villiers even debuting his work-in-progress, the play *La Révolte*, in Tribschen.⁷ Knowing just how reclusive Wagner had become, their access to him and his family was truly exceptional and thus had the appearance of a visit to a religious figure living in solitude. In fact, Wagner was never to welcome any more French visitors in this manner, with the exception

⁶ Judith Gautier was instrumental in organizing prestigious Wagnerian soirées in Paris with her “Bayreuth de poche” series at Nadar's photographic studio in 1880 and later with puppet theater. It is certainly possible she recounted some personal stories of her time with Wagner on such occasions. For more information, see James Ross's chapter “Music in the French Salon,” in *French Music Since Berlioz* (97).

⁷ Cosima Wagner details the reading and its positive reception by Wagner in her diary entry from July 25, 1869.

of Édouard Schuré, another one of Wagner's closest French friends but one who did not write fiction.⁸ Consequently, it gave them special credibility among French Wagnerites and bestowed mythical status upon their sixteen-day-long stay of 1869, with their second more contentious 1870 summer visit conveniently left aside.⁹

My aim, for the first part of this chapter, is to show that reassembling the pieces of the Tribschen puzzle can help us distinguish the beginnings of the Wagnerian mythology that was to become orthodoxy in the pages of the *Revue wagnérienne* twenty or so years later. Certainly, it is no coincidence Dujardin solicited the contributions of Mendès and Villiers for his *Revue*, if only because he was aware that they had enjoyed an unparalleled opportunity to discuss Wagner's works and theories with him in person. Although equal in Wagnerian stature, Judith Gautier was not recruited. This likely has a lot to do with her gender and perhaps also with her acrimonious relationship with her former husband Mendès but it may also be because her vision of Wagnerism, which was about absolute obedience to the wishes of the composer, did not conform with the experimental nature of the *Revue*.¹⁰

As we shall see, both Mendès and Villiers proved to be disappointing collaborators for Dujardin, mostly because they published very little in the *Revue wagnérienne*.¹¹ Furthermore, their

⁸ Schuré published a book entitled *Souvenirs sur Richard Wagner: La première de Tristan et Yseult* in 1900. Only one chapter, “Une visite chez Wagner. — Son portrait physique et moral. — Sa conception du théâtre,” centers on Schuré's friendship with the composer. Oddly, the name of Tribschen is not mentioned.

⁹ Cosima's diary shows that she and Wagner were reluctant to welcome the French trio again due to the events leading to the official declaration of war from the French government to Prussia on July 19, 1870: “Nach einem Brief Catulle Mendes' werden uns die Freunde wahrscheinlich nicht besuchen, und das ist uns recht, denn einen Franzosen jetzt zu sehen wäre sehr unangenehm” (*Die Tagebücher: 1869-1872* 257). / “According to a letter from Catulle Mendès, our friends will perhaps not visit us and that is fine by us since seeing a French person now would be very uncomfortable” (My translation).

¹⁰ Here it should be added that the *Revue wagnérienne* did not include a single contribution by a female critic. The lack of women in an avant-garde literary review such as the *Revue wagnérienne* was far from exceptional; rather, it was the norm.

¹¹ Mendès published theoretical articles—“Notes sur la théorie et l'œuvre Wagnériennes” (March 1885) and “Le vaisseau fantôme” (February 1886)—; fiction—“Le jeune prix de Rome et le vieux Wagnériste, entretien familial” (June 1885); and a sonnet: “L'Or du Rhin” (January 1887). Villiers's contributions are even fewer: they include the

critical writings on Wagner hardly withstand the test of time, suffering from a lack of originality on Mendès's part—with the occasional flash of brilliance—or a lack of rigorous theoretical engagement from Villiers. Yet, as I will argue, both authors were rather more insightful in their Wagnerian fiction, which includes Mendès's novel *Le Roi vierge* (1881) and Villiers's short story “Le secret de l'ancienne musique” (1878), both of which will be examined as trend-setting texts of French literary Wagnerism and will be closely analyzed later in this chapter.

A Visit to the German Palmiped

Thanks to the abundance of written documents available, reconstructing the journey of the Mendès couple along with their close friend Villiers is not a difficult task to perform for the modern-day researcher. In addition to the books mentioned above, there are relevant entries in Cosima Wagner's diary, a series of articles entitled “Notes de voyage” by Mendès for *Le National*, more travel notes from Gautier for *La Liberté* and *Le Rappel* and letters from Villiers to his friend Jean Marras. However, Judith Gautier's *Le Troisième Rang du collier*—referred to as *Visites à Richard Wagner* in this chapter—remains the most comprehensive source in spite of its deferred publication date and erasure of her former husband Mendès.¹² By examining a few key episodes from the 1869 Tribschen journey, as told by Gautier, Mendès and Villiers, I will be shedding light on the ways in which genre limits are blurred and travel writing borders on fiction. Moreover, I will also demonstrate how Mendès and, more prominently, Villiers anticipated some of French Wagnerism's favorite ironic strategies. In fact, much like Perseus in his fight against Medusa, Villiers refrained from staring directly into the depths of Wagner's genius for fear of creative

prophetic prose poem “La légende de Bayreuth” (May 1885) and the fictionalized autobiographical account of his Tribschen visit, “Souvenir” (June 1887).

¹² Mendès was in fact the first to “forget” to mention his then-wife's name in his 1883 obituary for Richard Wagner in *Gil Blas*, part of which made it to *La Légende du Parnasse contemporain* (1884) and *Richard Wagner* (1886).

paralysis. Hence his deploying humor and parodic hyperbole once his private letters were in danger of turning into a full-throated paean.

In Villiers's letters and Gautier's book, the first scene of importance takes place before the meeting with Wagner, in the border city of Basel where the travelers had just arrived by train and planned on a one-night stop before embarking on the final leg of their journey. As Wagnerian anecdotes go, it is remarkable because it already shows a propensity towards fictionalization, taking an impromptu Wagnerian performance as cue to begin embellishing real-life events. Greeted by a fairytale-like vision of old-town Germania, the travelers marvel at the Rhine river before hearing faint singing in the distance, presumably from across the bridge. As Villiers recounts to Jean Marras:

Tout à coup, à l'autre bout du pont, dans une maison illuminée, qu'est-ce que nous entendons ? Avons-nous, oui ou non, l'usage de nos oreilles ? Le Chœur des Matelots du *Vaisseau fantôme* ! J'ai jeté un grand cri ; et je me suis mis à courir. (...) En un clin d'œil nous arrivâmes à la brasserie où tous les soirs une société chorale d'Allemands graves vient prendre son bock et chante gratis, avec d'effroyables voix de basse et des hurlements qui se marient au bruit du Rhin, les chœurs de tous les opéras de Wagner, de Weber et de Gluck. (Letter 82 in *Correspondance générale de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* I 130)

This particular choral excerpt stems from the beginning of the third act of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (1840) and shares a ghost theme with Villiers's narrative. Indeed, in Wagner's opera, the chorus features Norwegian sailors in the throes of a drinking song with which they intend to entice unknown seafarers out of seclusion from the Dutchman's ship. But no one answers them until much later, and the response causes the Norwegians much fright because of its almost supernatural sonic power. However, in Villiers's letter, the roles have been inverted, with the disembodied voices originating from an unknown location—later revealed to be a beer hall—, and luring the travelers to join them. As Villiers's screaming and running would suggest, they would only do so at their peril.

Here it is also worth mentioning that Villiers introduces a distancing tactic he was to use in his other Wagnerian writings. By describing the singing as “effroyable” and made of “hurlements,” he implies some ambivalence—or, at the very least, caution—towards the seductions of Wagnerian music. In combination with his usage of a silly nickname for Wagner, whom he affectionately called “le palmipède” after the swan from *Lohengrin*, his satirical intent is obvious and helps mitigate his otherwise effusive descriptions of Wagner and his music.

Arguably, the palmiped sobriquet can serve as proof that, in contrast to Baudelaire, Villiers refused to fully “submit” to Wagner despite his sincere admiration. This desire was likely made all the more pressing because he was a musician himself and eventually composed his own music to accompany his plays.¹³ Thus, by performing impertinence towards Wagner, Villiers had discovered a coping mechanism that was to reappear in Dujardin's texts—chief among them *Pour la vierge du roc ardent*—and Wyzewa's *Valbert*, both of which will be examined in more detail in the next chapters.

The next excerpt from Villiers's letter to Marras further demonstrates his need to appropriate and twist Wagnerian themes so they could tally with his own imaginary world. This he does by straying from the factual retelling of the trip in order to stage himself and his companions as the protagonists of a Germanic play, in a scene that recalls the Auerbach tavern from *Faust I*¹⁴:

Judith, Catulle et moi, nous avons fait là une entrée, tu peux le croire. Nous avons pris un bock exquis en faisant bisser le Chœur des Matelots. Jamais tu n'as vu, ni entendu, ni rêvé ce que j'ai éprouvé. Judith en devenait superstitieuse. Mais il paraît que c'est partout comme cela ici, et le Palmipède est très connu. Ce chœur, en allemand, est une chose terrible, qui

¹³ Alan Raitt notes in *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* that Villiers enjoyed some musical training—in the form of organ and singing lessons as well as an instrumentation course—as a youth. (102) He also brings up a testimony from a singer named Courcoux who spoke of Villiers's competence as a sight-reader. (*Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, exorciste du réel* 25) The plays I am referring to are *Le Nouveau-Monde* (1880) and *Axël* (1890).

¹⁴ Incidentally, one of Villiers's first works was a rewriting of *Faust* (circa 1857), which he never completed. Later on, he described it as “décidément inepte.” For more details, consult Luc Badesco, *La Génération poétique de 1860* (634).

cloue sur les pieds. Je ne savais plus où j'étais. Et puis, quel décor ! Voilà des hommes sérieux. Puis ils nous ont encore chanté un air de chasse de *Tannausher* [sic]¹⁵ que je ne connaissais pas. Ils étaient une soixantaine avec des voix à briser les oreilles et ils filaient des sons par moments ! (130-131)

Asking for an encore is in itself a subversive gesture and one that is certainly more appropriate in the context of a French or Italian opera house than with Wagner, who deemed that his works had to be played without interruption from the spectators.¹⁶ Once more, negative adjectives and expressions abound, from the “chose terrible” to the physical discomfort of being “clou[é] sur les pieds” or the one caused by “des voix à se briser les oreilles.” Are we then to assume that the Swiss men are producing cacophonous sounds? This seems unlikely, especially so in light of Villiers's subsequent words of praise for their vocal technique. Indeed, “filer des sons” refers to the ability of a trained singer to showcase their control over dynamics, seamlessly shifting from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, or the opposite. But this advanced level of skill seems dubious coming from amateurs and suggests Villiers was exaggerating somewhat in his praise—and criticism—of the music, as he was wont to do since his vivid fantasies were often so much more colorful than his grim reality.¹⁷

As a matter of fact, Judith Gautier's account of the same story points to its being fictitious while Mendès does not even mention the singers in “La première halte,” the first article of his German travel series for *Le National* from July 23, 1869. If Gautier recalls having been similarly

¹⁵ Villiers's misspelling of *Tannhäuser* suggests a lack of familiarity with the work, contradicting Émile Drougard's statement that he had attended the premiere of *Tannhäuser* in 1861 (“Richard Wagner et Villiers de l'Isle-Adam,” 298). We should thus interpret the words uttered by Léon Bloy's imagined double for Villiers—Bohémond de L'Isle de France—in *La Femme pauvre* (itself a *roman à clef* from 1897) as fictitious: “Lorsque ce hors-d'œuvre des festins du Paradis qui se nomme *Tannhäuser*, dit-il d'une voix profonde et lointaine, fut livré aux chiens de l'Opéra et des alentours, il y aura bientôt vingt ans, pas un outrage ne fut oublié (...) Mais j'y étais et j'affirme que jamais la scurrilité de l'enfer ne se déploya davantage pour avilir une Visitation inexprimable” (*La Femme pauvre* 211).

¹⁶ Infamously so, once the curtain falls on *Parsifal*'s first act, it is expected of audiences not to clap. The tradition began in Bayreuth and is still observed widely in German opera houses.

¹⁷ Villiers was plagued by severe financial problems for most of his life and died in poverty. His precarious situation meant that he only rarely contributed to literary reviews—including the *Revue wagnérienne* and the *Revue indépendante*—because they paid very little.

intrigued by the incongruity of the male chorus from *Der fliegende Holländer* being heard on the streets of Basel, she claims that she and her companions were unable to retrace its origin and went as far as to believe they were hallucinating: “Nous étions singulièrement troublés, et, quand les voix se turent, nous nous éloignâmes sans vouloir approfondir le mystère, évitant de nous convaincre que quelque brasserie joyeuse, cachée dans un repli de la berge, abritait de braves Suisses, groupés autour de bocks mousseux, dont les voix sonores et pures nous avaient ainsi hallucinés” (*Visites à Richard Wagner* 21). In the absence of a logical explanation, it seems as if the Swiss tavern tale may have been a means for the three friends to soothe their anxieties as they wandered around a foreign city at night. Yet it looks like Villiers convinced himself of the veracity of what was in fact a coping mechanism and took this as an opportunity for fanciful embroidery on a Wagnerian theme.¹⁸ As we shall see, he was to adopt just as hyperbolic an attitude with regard to his descriptions of Wagner's performances at the piano.

The next scene worthy of scrutiny is the travelers' first encounter with Wagner. Having just arrived in Luzern by train, they catch their first sight of him on the platform. All three of them remember Wagner wearing a large straw hat, but only Mendès—in his 1883 obituary for Wagner published in *Gil Blas*, itself based on his description of “Hans Hammer,” Wagner's alter ego in *Le Roi vierge*—launches into an unflattering description of his physique and general demeanor. At a time when physiognomy was a trusted science, this unrealistic characterization of Wagner's appearance typifies French Wagnerism's qualms about his person past the Franco-Prussian War. Once more, this willful distortion conveys more about the author's personal beliefs than it does

¹⁸ Alan Raitt points to a later Wagner-related incident in which Villiers was just as unreliable a narrator. Unable to attend the Bayreuth Festival in 1876 due to financial difficulties, he still penned an article entitled *À propos des Fêtes de Bayreuth*: “Villiers se donne la satisfaction de décrire la façon inattendue dont ces prédictions se sont accomplies. On sent que le mécanisme compensateur commence à jouer, et que Villiers sera bientôt convaincu qu'il a effectivement assisté aux fêtes de Bayreuth” (*Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* 118).

about Wagner himself. And the fact that Mendès produced three variations on the same theme between 1881 (*Le Roi vierge*), 1883 (*Gil Blas*) and 1886 (*Richard Wagner*) testifies to his need to exorcise a personal conflict he underwent as a French man of Jewish origin who was ashamed of Wagner's chauvinism but enamored with his music.

To be sure, French Wagnerism of the 1880s was very apt at separating Wagner the man—and his problematic anti-French and anti-Semitic tirades—from his music. Mendès summarized their attitude best when he wrote: “J’ai été son ami, je ne le suis plus, mais je demeure son apôtre fervent ; je me borne à ne pas lui tendre les mains qui l’applaudissent...” (*Richard Wagner* V). However, he did not entertain such negative thoughts on Wagner in 1869, at a time when he was truly bewitched by the man and his music and echoed Judith Gautier's approbation. Indeed, his second “Notes de voyage” for *Le National* from August 3, 1869—entitled “La maison de Richard Wagner”—speak of “un front magnifique, qui rêve et qui pense,” his eyes being “radieusement purs.” By 1883, his disappointment with Wagner's involvement in politics was all too palpable, the fantasy of artistic purity—and political neutrality—having evaporated with the regrettable publication of *Eine Kapitulation* (1871), a nationalistic vaudeville mocking the events of the siege of Paris by the Prussian army. Knowing this, the greeting scene in Tribschen takes on a new dimension where Mendès's disappointment in his former hero is palpable:

À peine descendus de wagon, nous vîmes un grand chapeau de paille, et, dessous, une face pâle dont les yeux regardaient à droite, à gauche, très vite, avec un air de chercher. C’était lui. Intimidés, nous le considérions sans oser faire un pas. Il était petit, maigre, étroitement enveloppé d’une redingote de drap marron, et tout ce corps grêle, quoique très robuste peut-être, — l’air d’un paquet de ressorts, — avait dans l’agacement de l’attente, le tremblement presque convulsif d’une femme qui a ses nerfs. Mais le visage gardait une magnifique expression de hauteur et de sérénité. Tandis que la bouche aux lèvres très minces, pâles, à peine visibles, se tordait dans le pli d’un sourire amer, le beau front, — sous le chapeau rejeté en arrière, — le beau front vaste et pur, uni, entre des cheveux très doux, déjà grisonnants, qui fuyaient, montrait la paix inaltérable de je ne sais quelle immense pensée, et il y avait dans la transparence ingénue des yeux, — des yeux pareils à ceux d’un enfant ou d’une vierge, toute la belle candeur d’un rêve inviolé. (*Gil Blas* February 16, 1883)

Here the misogynistic undertones are representative of the arsenal used by anti-Wagnerians in the 1880s, most memorably by Nietzsche two years later in *The Case of Wagner* (1888). There, Nietzsche compared the music of *Parsifal* to a “stroke of genius in seduction” with Wagner “indulg[ing] every cowardice of the modern soul with the tones of magic maidens” (184).¹⁹ In feminizing Wagner, Nietzsche aligned himself with a Modernist tactic that saw mass culture, or any mediocre artwork for that matter, as “feminine,” thus positioning avant-garde creators or nonconformist philosophers like himself as “real” men.²⁰ When it comes to French Wagnerism, however, the examples examined in this dissertation are often more subtle in their use of feminine imagery with respect to Wagner. But it is no coincidence that Mendès depicts his Wagnerian *prima donna* Gloriane Gloriani as sexually terrifying in *Le Roi vierge* (1881), or that Wyzewa associates Wagnerian music with female adultery in the novel *Le Cahier rouge* (1917), where an Italian woman seduces the protagonist at the Bayreuth Festival while he discusses the merits of *Parsifal* with her husband. In both instances, temptresses stand for Wagnerian music's erotic power and its ability to cancel out critical thinking.

This last excerpt from the Tribschen texts will serve as an exemplification of French Wagnerism's dualistic approach to Wagner—at once profoundly reverent and subtly irreverent. It features Wagner sitting at the piano and playing excerpts from his works—including from the *Ring* cycle which had yet to be premiered—to entertain his guests. While Judith Gautier's recollection

¹⁹ This supposed effeminacy was likely inspired by Wagner's own characterization of music as female in *Oper und Drama*. Here is the original German text: “Der Parsifal wird in der Kunst der Verführung ewig seinen Rang behalten, als der Geniestreich der Verführung... (...) Wie er jeder Feigheit der modernen Seele mit Zaubermädchen-Tönen zu Willen redet!” (*Der Fall Wagner* 44-45).

²⁰ I am paraphrasing Andreas Huyssen's argument in his chapter “Mass Culture as Woman, Modernism's Other” in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (44-62). Moreover, Huyssen describes Nietzsche as the “most eloquent and influential representative” of “the powerful masculinist and misogynist current within the trajectory of modernism” (49). As previously argued in my introduction, Symbolism was just as masculinist a movement.

of Wagner's pianistic style is quite matter-of-fact and emphasizes his propensity for acting²¹—"Il joue les thèmes, à mesure, déclame, chante, avec un entrain, une violence incomparable, une expression si parfaite que l'on croit voir le drame se dérouler" (*Visites à Richard Wagner* 35)—Villiers delivers a poetic description that belongs to the register of the sublime, at once chilling and poignant:

Nous sommes obligés de l'arracher du piano (quel piano ! sourd, sonore, profond, ondoyant, magique, un gong de cristal, un orage, un tonnerre, et d'une douceur, un murmure divin quand il veut !) Nous sommes obligés de lui dire : assez ! Et quand il chante, c'est fou, c'est à ne pas croire ! parce qu'au bout de deux heures, nous sommes réellement malades. Ce n'est plus un piano ni une voix : c'est une vision : l'orchestre ne signifie rien avec lui. Il est impossible d'aller plus loin, et nous nous mettons tous à pleurer et à gambader dans la maison. Judith lui donne des coups et nous sautons sur lui. Madame de Bülow—il appelle madame de Bülow sa 'grande amie'—dit qu'il n'est pas comme cela d'habitude avec personne, et qu'il ne joue que rarement. Il nous joue tout, tant que nous voulons. C'est parce qu'il sent bien que nous nous ferions tuer. Il nous traite d'enthousiastes, et tout le monde l'admire dans la ville comme le plus grand homme de l'Allemagne. Il ne reçoit personne, personne, jamais. C'est le grand Inspiré de la musique universelle du monde visible et invisible. Avec lui et sa poésie, on touche, comme il dit à l'autre bord ! Et il a été sublime quand il a dit ça. (*Correspondance générale de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* I 135)

Several elements deserve commentary in this passage. For one, there is a clear dissociation between Wagner the polite straw-hat-wearing dinner companion and the artist, the latter having shed his humanity in order to become possessed by divine inspiration: "Ce n'est plus un piano ni une voix : c'est une vision." Let us not be fooled: if Wagner is calling the trio "enthousiastes" in this passage, he is in fact referring to himself according to the ancient Greek meaning of the word. As seen in Plato's *Ion*, enthusiasm is synonymous with the godly inspiration that can befall rhapsodes in the moment of performance and puts them "out of [their] senses", turning them into

²¹ Nietzsche later criticized Wagner for being disingenuous, or, in the tradition of Diderot's *Le Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1777), a mere actor. Section 11 of *The Case of Wagner* begins thus: "Ich habe erklärt wohin Wagner gehört—nicht in die Geschichte der Musik. Was bedeutet er trotzdem in deren Geschichte? Die Heraufkunft der Schauspielers in der Musik..." (36). / "I have explained where Wagner belongs—not in the history of music. What does he signify nevertheless in that history? *The emergence of the actor in music...*" (178-180).

a “light and winged and sacred thing” (534b). In turn, their audience feels a tinge of the divinity that speaks through the poet and, in that process, becomes united with the rhapsode in a “long chain” that derives its power from the divine, which Socrates designates as a hidden magnet in his analogy (533d-e).

In a gesture that foreshadows the morbid aesthetics of the Decadence and his own *Contes cruels*, Villiers dares to go further than Plato in speculating that the territory of the divine is in fact the realm of the dead. This much can be derived from Wagner's alleged designation of his artistic practice as akin to reaching “l'autre bord,” perhaps in reference to the river Styx. The connection is also strengthened once we pay closer attention to the reactions of the listeners in the room, with Villiers telling Marras that he and his companions felt so shaken up by the sounds of Wagner's piano as to become “réellement malades”—another term that anticipates Nietzsche's condemnation of Wagnerian music as a sickness (*The Case of Wagner* 164). However, this initial moment of musically induced discomfort is quickly overcome to give way to blissful tears, as if Villiers and the others had undergone a ritual of purification. Frolicking about and playing like innocent children, they express their gratitude for the poet who has opened their eyes to the existence of the “monde (...) invisible” beyond the phenomenal world.²²

In Villiers's letter, Wagner's listeners are so grateful for this revelation as to have reached the point of becoming fanatics ready to die for the Wagnerian cause (as the melodramatic “nous nous ferions tuer” would attest). Was he in earnest in this retelling of events, or was he again taking creative license? Indeed, his portrayal of Wagner's playing is so extreme as to attract circumspection. Earlier in the same letter, he did portray his genuine emotional reaction to Wagnerian music with a degree of self-deprecation—“je beuglais comme le dernier des veaux !”—

²² This conception of music as a gateway towards the *noumenon* is Schopenhauerian. It is unlikely Villiers read him because he was too preoccupied with Hegel at the time and was not that systematic a reader of philosophical texts.

that borders on the parodic (134). Was Villiers's use of satire perhaps inspired by his intuition of the Wagner couple's ambivalence towards him?²³ At any rate, as the one single man in Tribschen and one who was not a militant supporter of Wagner, he did not quite fit in. Arguably, his position as the odd one out was reflected in his writings and led Villiers away from the path of staunch devotion followed by Gautier and Mendès. But in peppering his ecstatic letters with irony, he epitomized the delicate balancing act between adoration and satire that is one of the founding tenets of French Wagnerism.

Beside his ironic outlook on the mystic pull exerted by Wagnerian music and the unpredictable alternation of reverence and irreverence he manifested towards Wagner, Villiers inaugurated yet another key trend in French Wagnerism with his 1869 texts: a strong preference for mental theater over the contingencies of live performance. This was made especially apparent in his review of the final dress rehearsal of *Das Rheingold* in Munich.²⁴ Having begun his career in the world of letters as a music critic ten years earlier, he was no stranger to the genre.²⁵ Comparing Villiers's critique of *Das Rheingold* and the Mendès couple's separate accounts of the same performance is quite instructive because of their disparate approaches, which reflect the future rift between the more loyalist French Wagnerism of Gautier or Schuré and the literary brand of Wagnerism heralded by Dujardin. On the one hand, a faithful description of events in a manner

²³ According to Cosima Wagner's diary, she and Wagner only warmed up to Villiers's artistic talents once he read *La Révolte* to them. Many years later, Judith Gautier allegedly told Willy that Wagner “avait horreur de Villiers de l'Isle Adam, entre autres, il affectait de le croire enragé, il grimpait aux arbres pour échapper à ses morsures, bouffonnerie dont le pauvre Villiers s'attristait...” (*Souvenirs littéraires... et autres* 105).

²⁴ The article appeared in *L'Universel* on September 21, 1869 and has since been republished as “L'Or du Rhin” in the *Œuvres complètes* II (792-797).

²⁵ Villiers published reviews of two performances given at the Opéra: Félicien David's *Herculanum* (December 11, 1859) and Giuseppe Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (December 18, 1859) for *La Causerie*. According to G. Jean-Aubry “Ces deux petits feuilletons musicaux sont, en date, les premiers écrits en prose que l'on connaisse du futur auteur d'*Axel*” (“Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et la musique” *Mercure de France* XV (1938) 41).

that would garner Wagner's approval, on the other, purely subjective associations loosely based on the plot.

In juxtaposing these three texts and in acknowledging their separate methods, it is possible to doubt the veracity of Baudelaire's key theoretical insight in “Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris”: “démontrer que la véritable musique suggère des idées analogues dans des cerveaux différents” (*Œuvres complètes* II 784). If Mendès, Gautier and Villiers all riff on similar images, it has rather more to do with prior exposure to the material—since Wagner had played them excerpts of *Das Rheingold* the previous month—and the visual representation of the story in the theater. But their critical approaches differ substantially. Reading only Villiers, one would be completely unaware of the production's inadequacies or its specifics, for that matter.

To begin with, Mendès and Gautier's texts summarize the plot of the unknown opera as best they can while conjuring metaphors that would adequately reflect the sense of wonder they felt once the famous Eb chord of the prelude began to resound in the opera house. Respectively, he resorts to the *je ne sais quoi* trope by calling it “un balancement lent et continu mais on ne sait pas encore ce qui se meut ainsi” (*Le National* September 5, 1869) while she goes in a more poetic direction with “ces ondes musicales s'enflent et se succèdent sans relâche. Des notes de lumière diffuse tombent et s'évalent comme des gouttes de lait” (*Le Rappel* September 7, 1869). If they give out lavish praise to the music and the performers, they are much more critical of the staging and costumes, both of which had drawn Wagner's ire to the point that he did everything in his

power to shut down the production despite Ludwig II's orders that *Das Rheingold* be premiered at all costs.²⁶ In sum, they were repeating the Wagnerian party line.²⁷

By contrast, Villiers begins his article with a short prose poem that seems more interested in conveying the pictures he entertained in his imagination while under the influence of the music than in reliably transcribing the general musical direction of the prelude to readers unfamiliar with the material. Recycling a couple of key notions he presumably gathered from talking to Wagner or from looking at the score—the origin myth and the aquatic theme, mainly—Villiers launches into a phantasmagorical depiction of the Rhine landscape. The end result is closer in tone to his idiosyncratic descriptions of Basel and its invented ghostly male chorus than what effectively went on in the orchestra pit and on the stage.²⁸ Furthermore, the numerous exclamation points indicate a level of musical rapture that few critics would dare use for fear of not appearing rigorous enough in their judgment:

Il fait nuit... Les premières mesures solennelles sont à peine distinctes. Le Rhin immense, l'ancien des fleuves, roule silencieusement ses flots, premiers-nés du monde, et les brumes des Eddas, les visions des vieilles cosmogonies, plus lointaines que les traditions des hommes, s'éveillent. Et toujours des flots sur des flots ! ... Puis, les larges montagnes humides s'écroulent et se mêlent, et les cercles des vagues, confondus avec l'espace, s'étendent, se prolongent, se perdent, poussés par de nouveaux flots qui montent, grossissent et disparaissent dans le tumulte de l'eau surnaturelle ! ... L'eau, comme un poids harmonieux, oppresse les sons subjugués, le murmure initial est devenu tonnerre, car les ondes sacrées baignent maintenant les pieds de la montagne des dieux ! La toile s'enlève brusquement sur l'intérieur même du fleuve et parmi les flots crépusculaires, des voix de cristal se répondent. (*Œuvres complètes* II 792)

²⁶ For more background on Wagner and Ludwig II's artistic partnership and differences, see Patrick Carnegy's chapter "The Art of the Future – By Royal Command" in *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (46-68). In the case of *Das Rheingold*, Carnegy singles out the moment when Wagner received costume sketches and "saw that his mythopoeic vision of the *Ring* was about to be betrayed by a characteristically Ludwigian attempt to give it historical roots" (64).

²⁷ In a later satirical article entitled "Épître au roi de Thuringe," which first appeared in *Gil Blas* (January 19, 1886) under the title "Épître à sa Majesté Frédéric II," before it was reworked and reprinted in *Richard Wagner*, Mendès reaffirmed the grotesque nature of the Munich production and claimed he was instrumental in bringing Wagner to Munich so he could see the disaster for himself and prevent the official premiere of *Das Rheingold* from taking place. The text is noteworthy for resurrecting the characters, locations and folklore from *Le Roi vierge* (1881) and can be considered as a sequel to the novel.

²⁸ Carnegy adds that although the set designer Heinrich Döll had devised a swimming machine for the Rhinemaidens, he resorted to having ballet dancers ride them while mouthing the words that were sung from the wings. This less than adequate scenic illusion was likely due to insufficient rehearsal time. (Idem)

What is particularly striking in this excerpt is how eminently visual it is once Villiers puts aside his obligatory mention of the first few bars of music, as if he were reluctant to speak on the music itself. In this regard, the paragraph strays from the model established by Baudelaire with his highly sensual response to the prelude of *Lohengrin*, where he enjoyed “une extase faite de volupté et de connaissance” (*Œuvres complètes* II 785) in order to propose an alternative privileging the imagination over the senses.

My contention is that Villiers's article is significant because it prefigures the genre of the Wagnerian paraphrase as featured in the *Revue wagnérienne*. These include his close friend Huysmans's prose poem on the *Tannhäuser* overture and Dujardin's “Amfortas, paraphrase moderne,” both of which propose subjective variations on the plots of specific Wagnerian works instead of analyzing the music and its effects.²⁹ Consider the first paragraph from Huysmans's text as another description whose main purpose is to recreate an inner landscape before the author reluctantly turns his attention to the music:

Dans un paysage comme la nature n'en saurait créer, dans un paysage où le soleil s'apâlit jusqu'à l'exquise et suprême dilution du jaune d'or, dans un paysage sublimé où sous un ciel maladivement lumineux, les montagnes opalisent au-dessus des bleuâtres vallons le blanc cristallisé de leurs cimes ; dans un paysage inaccessible aux peintres, car il se compose surtout de chimères visuelles, de silencieux frissons, et de moiteurs frémissantes d'air, un chant s'élève, un chant singulièrement majestueux, un auguste et pacifiant cantique élané de l'âme des las pèlerins qui s'avancent en troupe. (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 59)

Knowing that Huysmans wrote this text in the wake of an orchestral performance makes such expressions as “un paysage inaccessible aux peintres” and “chimères visuelles” take on another dimension, the one of an *âgon* where poets and painters have to compete with the suggestive

²⁹ The latter is extensively analyzed by Steven Huebner in “Édouard Dujardin, Wagner, and the Origins of Stream of Consciousness Writing,” *19th-Century Music* 37:1 (Summer 2013): 77-80. On Huysmans and paraphrases, see Alice De Georges-Métral's article “Les paraphrases de Huysmans: Une écriture visuelle et sonore” in *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem* 24 (2013).

powers of Wagnerian music by enhancing their respective medium's ability to capture the complexity of their inner world.³⁰

Huysmans's disregard for the music was only part of what made the text provocative; he also angered many of the *Revue*'s readers thanks to his affected poetic language and the distracting presence of a highly transgressive variation on Wagner's Venus character: Sodomita Libido.³¹ In truth, the commissioner of the article—Édouard Dujardin—was utterly discomfited by the text and later regretted what he took to be a *lèse-majesté* offense on the part of his colleague against Wagner's music: “Huysmans a écrit sur l’ouverture de Tannhaeuser une page qui n’est qu’un brillant démarchage du programme que l’ouvreuse lui avait distribué; il n’avait pas même écouté ; et il n’est jamais retourné au concert” (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 40). Like Huysmans with Dujardin, Villiers's review also shared the misfortune of not pleasing his editor—a Wagner skeptic—who had it preceded by a disclaimer in order to distance himself from the exalted tone of the article. Coincidentally, neither Huysmans nor Villiers were to repeat the experiment and publish another Wagnerian music review.

And yet, by the 1880s, at a time when a new generation of French Wagnerites was coming of age after getting their first taste of Wagnerian music at the Cirque d'hiver or in private concerts, Villiers was widely seen as a lodestar of French Wagnerism by his younger peers, and so was Mendès. If their Tribschen visit had become the stuff of legend, their Wagnerian activities throughout the 1870s played a large role in consolidating their status as leaders of a fledgling movement. While Mendès published a great number of articles dedicated to Wagner and attended

³⁰ Cécile Leblanc describes the sentence beginning with “Dans un paysage inaccessible aux peintres” as an apt illustration of “l’une des données fondamentales du symbolisme : communiquer l’incommunicable, représenter l’irreprésentable, en un mot n’exprimer rien d’autre que le subjectif” (*Wagnérisme et création en France* 55).

³¹ Dujardin recalls the controversy in his memoir from 1936: “Les choses se gâtèrent tout à fait avec la paraphrase que Huysmans écrivit sur l’ouverture de *Tannhaeuser*. (...) Huysmans (...) resté naturaliste malgré toute la curiosité qui l’entraînait vers les nouveautés symbolistes, (...) plus peintre que musicien, ne comprit à proprement parler rien...” (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 216).

important Wagnerian premieres in Germany and Belgium³², Villiers's methods as a Wagnerian propagandist were mostly rooted in his pianistic practice and his fabulous ability to emulate Wagner himself in an approximation of the one-man orchestra he had witnessed in Tribschen. As I will explain later in this chapter, he consciously published very little on Wagner. If Mendès repeated the same points of contention and admiration over and over again as a means of solving his own Wagner problem, Villiers did the exact opposite.

The next part of this chapter will be devoted to Mendès's *Le Roi vierge* (1881), a little studied Wagnerian *roman à clef* that features Richard Wagner (as Hans Hammer), Ludwig II (as King Frédérick II of Thuringia) and Franz Liszt (under the guise of Abbé Glinck). Throughout my close reading of the novel, I will be stressing two important points: first, that *Le Roi vierge* is a novel that truly benefits from being placed in dialogue with later Symbolist or Decadent works such as Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884), Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887) and Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892), and second, that the axis on which the entire novel revolves—that is, the adversarial relationship between the singer Gloriane Gloriani and the chaste King she aims to seduce, Frédérick II—mirrors the tensions inherent to French Wagnerism. My contention is that beyond the issue of sexuality, what is really at stake in the conflict opposing Gloriane and Frédérick is the fidelity to the source material, in other words, to Wagner. More specifically, Gloriane evokes the temptation to reinterpret Wagner constantly in order to move past the position of epigone while Frédérick symbolizes the desire to admire his works quietly without interference. Furthermore, while Gloriane promotes bending Wagnerian music to her will,

³² Besides the two-part review of *Das Rheingold* for *Le National* in 1869 and his “Notes de voyage” series for the same newspaper, these include coverage of four Weimar performances from 1870 for *La Patrie*: “Le vaisseau fantôme” (June 22, 1870); “Lohengrin” (June 26, 1870); “Tannhäuser” (July 1, 1870); “Les maîtres chanteurs” (July 3, 1870); as well as an article on *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in Munich (*La Patrie* July 15, 1870). Mendès also reported back on the world premiere of the *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth for *Le Gaulois* (15-17 August, 1876) and *Parsifal* (*Le Petit Parisien* August 4, 1882), the latter under the pseudonym of Jean Prouvaire.

Frédéric represents the illusory desire to keep the music as it was the first time he heard it. Her Wagner is in movement, his is congealed in the absolute.

Le Roi vierge: the Wagnerian roman à clef as proto-Symbolist work

Although Catulle Mendès was a fixture of the Parisian literary scene from 1860 until his death in 1909, he has since become a marginal figure in French literature. An extraordinarily prolific writer, he tried his hand at every single genre available to him—poetry, novel, fairy tale, theater, operatic libretto, short story—often with real commercial and critical success. However, he had several factors going against him on his way to artistic canonization: for one, he was born Abraham Catulle Mendès and lived at a time when French society was becoming increasingly antagonistic towards and suspicious of its Jewish citizens, as illustrated by Drumont's hateful tract *La France juive* (1886) and the notorious Dreyfus affair.³³ Additionally, he was constantly compared to more important writers at his expense due to perceived similarities. Condemned by Léon Bloy as a second-rate Victor Hugo who had penned “de véritables chefs-d’œuvre d’imitation” (*Propos d’un entrepreneur de démolitions* 207), or by Charles Le Goffic as “le plus magnifique exemplaire de l’art du décalque” (*Les Romanciers d’aujourd’hui* 277), his works were widely seen as the product of a competent wordsmith without a voice of his own. It is a testament to the force of that reputation of unoriginality that his literary output remains neglected to this day in spite of its merits, chief among them being Mendès's sense of humor and unbridled poetic imagination.³⁴

³³ Indeed, Mendès was the victim of anti-Semitic prejudice from fellow writers throughout his life and even after his death. Take, for instance, these words from Léon Daudet—a notorious anti-Semite—who described Mendès in 1915 as “cet hébreu des villes maudites (...) à l’affût de toutes les combinaisons de presses nouvelles” (*L’Entre-Deux-Guerres* 138).

³⁴ With the exception of a couple of somewhat recent academic conferences, including the 2005 symposium “Catulle Mendès : l’énigme d’une disparition,” which was followed by a conference volume, and the 2009 Bordeaux event “Catulle Mendès et la République des lettres,” which resulted in a 2011 volume.

Le Roi vierge came relatively early in Mendès's novelistic career. Having mostly made his name as a Parnassian poet, playwright, critic and editor in the 1860s, he published his first novel, *La Vie et la mort d'un clown* in 1879 and his second, *Les Mères ennemies* in 1880.³⁵ Both of these texts can be described as historical novels in the Romantic vein and demonstrate the extent of their author's grand narrative ambitions. *Le Roi vierge*, however, is more modest in scope, although it sets itself the task of documenting the internecine wars among various factions of the “Thuringian” (Bavarian) court. Subtitled “roman contemporain,” it features the then reigning King of Bavaria Ludwig II (1845-1886) as its protagonist, and was single-handedly responsible for starting a Ludwigan craze among fin-de-siècle writers and poets.

Indeed, in the wake of Mendès's 1881 novel came Verlaine's sonnet “La mort de S.M. Le Roi Louis II de Bavière” in *La Revue wagnérienne* of July 1886, Montesquiou's *Les Chauves-souris* (1892), Maurice Barrès's *L'Ennemi des lois* (1895) and Gustave Kahn's *Le Roi fou* (1896). From a historical perspective, insofar as *Le Roi vierge* anticipated the appeal of an unmarried art-loving King to the decadents and turned a foreign story into a myth for the ages, it was a trend-setting work.³⁶ But as a novel obsessed with sexual abnormality—be it an excess of sensuality or a denial of biological instincts—it also inscribed itself within a fin-de-siècle preoccupation with “deviant” sexuality as epitomized by Krafft-Ebing's seminal *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886).³⁷

³⁵ In his review of *La Vie et la mort d'un clown*, Barbey d'Aurevilly also compared Mendès to Victor Hugo, writing “comme Hugo, un poète, et un poète trop ardent pour avoir l'observation du romancier. De là les grands défauts d'un roman qui veut être une étude de la société d'il y a quelques années” (*Le Roman contemporain* 268).

³⁶ The text, however, makes no explicit reference to Ludwig II's real-life homosexuality and his multiple affairs with men of a lower-class background. Yet it seems as if rumors of the King's orientation had already reached French ears by the late 1860s. See, for instance, Félix de Salles's *La Bavière depuis 1866* (1869), with a few relevant excerpts quoted on Luc-Henri Roger's blog, *Munich and Co.* <http://munichandco.blogspot.com/2018/08/louis-ii-vu-par-un-francais-en-1869-fou.html>. Last accessed November 11, 2019.

³⁷ Jérôme Solal sees *Le Roi vierge* as the first novel of a Mendèsian trilogy on sexual transgression: “Les trois romans *Le Roi vierge*, *Zo'har* et *Méphistophéla* se fondent dans un paysage littéraire et idéologique où le thème transgressif apparaît comme un *topos*. D'autres romans de Zola, Huysmans, Bonnetain, Rachilde, Péladan, Rodenbach ou Bourges, déclinent différentes formes d'écart par rapport à la norme sexuelle. Le bizarre fascine, l'exception fait presque figure de règle, et Mendès baigne, à l'aise, dans la mouvance fin-de-siècle aux valeurs empreintes de noire effervescence. Il est dans le courant” (“Mendès et les lois de la transgression” 162).

Constantly oscillating between the ironic and lyrical registers, the text's mixture of “prose and lyricism”—to reprise the dichotomy used by Dujardin for *Les Lauriers sont coupés*—strikes the twenty-first-century reader as being in the same irreverent vein as Laforgue's *Moralités légendaires* (1887), another literary work where myths are poeticized for a contemporary sensibility before they are questioned through parody.

Yet very little scholarship has been devoted to this novel and virtually nothing about it has been published in English. Besides Hubert Juin's preface to the 1986 re-edition of the novel, it is only mentioned in wider studies of fin-de-siècle literature such as Émilien Carassus's *Le Snobisme et les lettres françaises de Paul Bourget à Marcel Proust* (1966), or Cécile Leblanc's *Wagnérisme et création* (2005). The most detailed analyses have come from Dominique Laporte's 2004 article “‘Mais le père est là-bas dans l'île’ (T. de Banville): L'Enjeu de la ‘paternité’ hugolienne chez Catulle Mendès,” Pierre-Jean Dufief's discussion of fin-de-siècle narratives devoted to Ludwig II in “Louis II Christ fin de siècle” from 2008 and Jérôme Solal's chapter on sexual transgression in three Mendès novels included in the 2011 volume, *Catulle Mendès et la République des lettres*.³⁸ However, none of these articles are solely dedicated to *Le Roi vierge*. Only Michał Mrozowicki has published a complete study in 2014 with “*Le Roi vierge* — ou quelques insignifiantes remarques sur le duel d'un poète... et d'un monarque,” but he is rather more concerned with the overall historical context of French Wagnerism and Mendès's trajectory as a Wagnerian than with proposing an interpretation of the novel in relation to other Symbolist and Decadent texts.³⁹

³⁸ For the exact references, see *Le Snobisme et les lettres françaises de Paul Bourget à Marcel Proust, 1884-1914* (313-315); *Wagnérisme et création* (214-215; 360); “‘Mais le père est là-bas dans l'île’ (T. de Banville): L'Enjeu de la ‘paternité’ hugolienne chez Catulle Mendès,” *Dalhousie French Studies* 69 (Winter 2004): 15-21; “*Plus Noble que le Roi*”: *Représentations littéraires de la noblesse* (101-110) and “Mendès et les lois de la transgression” in *Catulle Mendès et la République des lettres* (161-174).

³⁹ “*Le Roi vierge* — ou quelques insignifiantes remarques sur le duel d'un poète... et d'un monarque” in *Cahiers ERTA* 6 (2014): 177-226.

Overall, none of these commentators has given much thought to Mendès's handling of Wagnerian themes, most likely because they took the presence of Wagner and his works in *Le Roi vierge* to be merely anecdotal. This is exemplified by Cécile Leblanc, the author of the most comprehensive French-language study of French Wagnerism to date, who dismisses the possibility that *Le Roi vierge* might be a Wagnerian novel in earnest: “Le premier, Catulle Mendès, avait, dans *Le Roi vierge*, mis en scène Wagner sous le nom de Hans Hammer, mais il s'en était tenu à des anecdotes et des détails de la biographie de Wagner. Ce livre avait surtout contribué à faire naître le mythe du roi Louis II...” (214-215). My purpose, in this part of the chapter, is to refute that idea and show that while *Le Roi vierge* may not have so much to say about Wagner himself, it resonates a whole lot more with the tenets of French Wagnerism and the other *romans célibataires* examined in this dissertation.⁴⁰ From the fixation with purity to the presence of celibacy, seclusion, elitism and aestheticism, many of the novel's key themes are recurring preoccupations in later Symbolist and Decadent narratives. Moreover, its hyperbolic aesthetic, which is applied to Wagnerian and Christian themes, also foreshadows the more mystical writings of Péladan or Huysmans. It could thus be argued that *Le Roi vierge*, despite its lack of interest in formal experimentation, is in fact a prototype for the future Symbolist novel on a thematic level, its protagonist's psychosexual disorders announcing the various levels of sexual discomfort observed in Dujardin or Wyzewa's fiction.

The contemporary reception of *Le Roi vierge* attests to some confusion on the part of its readers, a likely indicator that the text was ahead of its time. At the outset, the novel's sexual morals

⁴⁰ The term is borrowed from the classic study of the fin-de-siècle French novel, *Le Roman célibataire: d'À rebours à Paludes* (1996). Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887) as well as Wyzewa's *Valbert* (1893) are named by Jean-Pierre Bertrand as two of the thirteen novels examined in the book, both of them featuring an example of an idle bachelor, or “héros célibataire,” who seeks to escape from the base realities of modern French society in order to live in a purer world of art and dreams. As I argue in the introduction, this withdrawal was the basis for Symbolism's reactionary ideology and misogyny.

formed the crux of the critical debate. In their reviews, critics pointed either to Gloriane's chaotic sensuality, or Frédérick's total rejection of sexuality as a reflection of Mendès's personal ethics. The first interpretation was illustrated by an anonymous reviewer at *La Jeune France* who compared Mendès to Sade and called the novel a “diable de livre” (May 1, 1881). Conversely, Mendès's unusual choice of a virgin protagonist was placed in more or less explicit contrast with Zola's recently published *Nana* (1880) and was seen by the critic Louis Ulbach as a sign of refinement: “Peut-être M. Catulle Mendès a-t-il voulu écrire une allégorie et, devant les nudités qui font le trottoir littéraire, a-t-il voulu montrer à quels excès de virginité, de pudeur outrée peut conduire le dégoût de certain réalisme” (*Le Rappel* June 18, 1881).⁴¹ Perhaps the author's refusal to take an obvious stand between two sexual extremes was also responsible for the critic Maxime Gaucher's admission that *Le Roi vierge* had momentarily defeated his critical abilities: “C'est une œuvre étrange et hardie, si hardie qu'il me serait difficile de l'analyser ici; mais c'est l'œuvre d'un écrivain de grand talent” (*La Revue Bleue* May 28, 1881 697). As the adjective “hardi” would indicate, *Le Roi vierge*'s treatment of human desire is both bold in its honesty and brazen in its chronicling of its excesses, a feature it shares with both the Naturalists and the Decadents. This penchant for extravagance is best exemplified by the conclusion where the King of Thuringia—in effect, Ludwig II—gets crucified in a grotesque reenactment of the Passion of Christ that goes terribly wrong. According to Mendès, the latter angered Bavarian censors so much that they withdrew copies of the novel in German translation from bookstores.⁴²

⁴¹ This is ironic as Catulle Mendès was a well-known ladies' man. See note 16 in the prologue, or André Gide's vivid description of an older Mendès in his *Journal*: “lui-même, en habit noir, plastronnait, bedonnait, rejetait en arrière sa tête de Christ pour bordels...” (*Journal* vol. 2 (August 3, 1930) 223).

⁴² Mendès mocked Ludwig II's alleged susceptibility in the satirical open letter “Épître au roi de Thuringe,” writing: “Sire, Vous avez daigné faire saisir par votre police, dans toutes les librairies de votre royaume, la traduction allemande du roi Vierge” (*Richard Wagner* 21).

As the previous reference to Zola would suggest, Naturalism and its portrayal of human diseases and moral failures were on everyone's minds at the time of *Le Roi vierge*'s release. Five years prior, Mendès's open support for Zola with the serialization of the last chapters from *L'Assommoir* (1876) in his newest literary journal *La République des lettres* certainly cemented the notion of a kinship between both authors. *Le Roi vierge*'s subtitle, "roman contemporain," further solidified the parallel and likely inspired critics to envisage the novel as the fictional investigation of "deux cas bien différents d'aberration morale et physique: l'emportement des sens allant, chez une femme, jusqu'à la possession diabolique; l'horreur de la chair allant, chez un homme, jusqu'au crime" (*La Liberté* May 18, 1881). The characters of Gloriane, who dominates the first part (entitled "Gloriane"), and Frédérick II, the main subject of the second ("Frédérick"), would thus represent case studies of erotic neuroses conducted with the help of the scientific method highlighted in Zola's *Le Roman expérimental* (1880). Never mind Mendès's witty sense of humor, or his taste for linguistic ornateness, all of which went against Zola's aesthetics.

Notwithstanding the final crucifixion scene, Ulbach claimed that Mendès had delivered an authentic portrait of mental illness, with the Thuringian court taking on the role of an insane asylum: "cette vague étude faite avec tant de chaleur et de couleur, sur un maniaque que les aliénistes condamneraient au supplice de la douche, plutôt qu'au supplice de la croix" (*Le Rappel* June 18, 1881). Other critics, like Jean d'Arques in *Gil Blas* (June 29, 1881), pathologized Frédérick further and went as far as to designate his sexual hang-ups as the core concern of *Le Roi vierge*, believing that the key to the novel lay in a scene where the adolescent King witnesses a young peasant couple in the midst of having sex, and subsequently takes flight in horror:

Il tendit le cou, vivement, entre les lattes des roseaux.
 Il demeura stupide, les prunelles élargies, la bouche béante.
 Il regarda longtemps, sans haleine, s'accrochant aux roseaux pour ne pas tomber, avec l'air de quelqu'un qui contemple l'horreur d'un gouffre.

Puis tout à coup, il s'enfuit, rapide, effaré, les bras en arrière, comme s'il avait voulu écarter la poursuite d'une vision. (...)

Ce qu'il avait vu (...) c'était une fille de village, grasse, suante et débraillée, et sa jupe de cotonnade en l'air, se livrant à un robuste garçon qui lui tenait les épaules entre ses grosses mains. (*Le Roi vierge* 141)

Here it seems as if Mendès had anticipated Freud's concept of the “primal scene”—or *Urszene*—and its alleged perverse effects on a young person's psyche. Typically, the Freudian scenario would involve a child catching his/her parents in the act and explaining what he/she saw as an instance of violence, the trauma of this forbidden sight reemerging in dreams later in life and inhibiting his/her normal sexual development as an adult.⁴³

In his seminal book *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), Freud explained that primal scenes could also be at the root of his female patients' psychological and physical disturbances. This phenomenon was exemplified by “Katharina” whom he tried to help during a vacation in the mountains: “Angst bei jungen Mädchen hatte ich so oft als Folge des Grausens erkannt, das ein virginales Gemüth befällt, wenn sich zuerst die Welt der Sexualität vor ihm aufthut” (*Studien über Hysterie* 108). / “I had so often seen anxiety in young girls as a consequence of the horror that overcomes virginal minds when they are first faced with the world of sexuality” (130). Incidentally, Frédérick's disgust towards the mating couple also evolves into long-standing trauma that haunts him in adulthood. Furthermore, it is accompanied by fright over his own masculinity, the rejection of which sets in motion a process of feminization—the same strategy used by Mendès in his description of Wagner later in the novel—that culminates in self-castration at the end of the novel. This is the same desperate choice made by Klingsor in *Parsifal*:

Roi ! lui ! roi des hommes et des femmes ! Non seulement il faudrait qu'il restât parmi ceux qui se vautrent dans la bassesse des sens, mais il faudrait qu'il fût leur chef ! Il serait l'un des maîtres de cette humanité qui lui apparaissait désormais comme un grouillement

⁴³ As is the case with another patient of Freud's, the famed “Wolf Man” (Sergei Pankejeff), who spoke of a dream in which white wolves were sitting on the branches of a walnut tree in *Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose* (1914).

obscène de fornicateurs et de prostituées ! On prétendait faire de lui le bouc de ce troupeau, le taureau de cette étable, l'étalon de ce haras ! Qu'était-ce qu'un roi ? Le ruffien [sic] couronné d'une immense maison publique. Il fuyait, plein de dégoût. (145)

Having equated being King with being a red-blooded beast of a man, Frédérick prefers to shun both roles altogether and avoids his responsibilities as sovereign as much as he can. In adulthood, he has effectively become an infantile male “hysteric”—if we are to take this term in its late nineteenth-century meaning, which has a lot in common with our current concept of post-traumatic stress disorder—in other words, a young man plagued by the same anxieties towards sex as Freud's female patients. Although Charcot had been demonstrating since 1878 that males could also be afflicted by hysteria, his patients habitually stemmed from a working-class background, not from the aristocracy, and he claimed that their trauma was the direct result of a lack of moderation—be it with work, sex or alcohol—conducted in a public setting.⁴⁴ According to Charcot's distinction between male and female brands of hysteria, Frédérick is resolutely “female” in his illness because his emotional shock happened in private and had nothing to do with him indulging in his vices.⁴⁵

As in des Esseintes's family, where intermarriage is the culprit behind “la prédominance de la lymphé dans le sang” and the increasing “effémination des mâles,” the “Mittelsbach” royal family (the real-life House of Wittelsbach) is also nearing the end of its bloodline because all of its male members have been showing signs of “feminine” weakness, that is, in the grand fin-de-siècle misogynistic tradition, of childlike behavior.⁴⁶ (À rebours 67) According to Frédérick himself, his great-uncle, whom he calls “ce vieil enfant ivre,” was once caught juggling empty

⁴⁴ Mark S. Micale's *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations* includes a short discussion of male hysteria, which was the topic of the author's doctoral dissertation. (161-168) The notion of moderation as virile—and lack thereof as feminine—comes from the Greeks. See Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité* vol. 2 (112).

⁴⁵ I derive this differentiation between male and female forms of hysteria from Mark Micale. (165)

⁴⁶ For an example of a woman's infantilization in fiction, see chapter 2's discussion of *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, where Daniel Prince constantly belittles Léa and other women he finds attractive with childish nicknames. Bram Dijkstra also notes that late nineteenth-century art was “content to use Cupid as a tributary symbol of the denigration of woman as child (...) ‘the passion of love,’ physical desire for another, was in fact childish—a matter for women and breast-fed putti but not for grown, intellectual men” (*Idols of Perversity* 200).

explosive shells with bottles of alcohol while his soldiers were on the battlefield. Meanwhile, Frédérick's brother Welf is in the habit of welcoming ambassadors in his underwear, while another relative's schedule revolves solely around his mares: “monter une jument noire les soirs d'orage, une jument blanche, les jours de neige” (115). All of them are so puerile, they are widely thought to have let go of their manhood along with their sanity: “nous sommes tous quelque peu fous dans la branche Albertine des Mittelsbach” (Idem).⁴⁷ The implication is that the King himself has not been spared this hereditary curse, a fact that is confirmed by his habit of wearing a Lohengrin costume involving “un casque aux ailes de cygne éployé sur son front” (112). That is why his mother Thécla so insists on finding him a mate—ideally, an outsider like the diva Gloriane—so he can produce a healthy child who may save both the house of Mittelsbach and Germany at large.⁴⁸

This feminization of the King is supported by textual evidence as he is constantly referred to by other players in the novel as girlish, soft, or childlike: “Svelte comme il est, on eût dit d'une longue jeune fille en habits blancs de général” (41). Moreover, he happens to live in a cloister-like city called “*Nonnenbourg*” (my emphasis), a fictional counterpart for Munich, where the King's aversion to sexuality sets the tone for his subjects' dull lifestyles: “ce n'est pas une cour, c'est un couvent et beaucoup de couvents sont plus gais” (42). But no scene of the novel is more explicit

⁴⁷ There is some historical basis to Mendès's grim depiction of the house of Wittelsbach: Ludwig II himself was dethroned in 1886 due to “insanity,” a diagnosis made by the physician Bernhard von Gudden which has since been disputed by Heinz Häfner and Felix Sommer in the 2013 article “The Bavarian royal drama of 1886 and the misuse of psychiatry: new results,” *History of Psychiatry* 24:3: 274-291. His brother and successor, Otto of Bavaria, was also widely believed to be mentally ill and was deposed in 1913.

⁴⁸ Indeed, Thécla's plans involve her son taking over not just Bavaria but the whole of Germany: “Oh ! enfant, as-tu donc l'oreille si assourdie de musiques, et l'esprit si affolé de songes, que tu n'entendes pas monter le vœu profond des races, que tu ne comprends pas ce que le destin élabore ? L'Allemagne, jadis colossale, s'est écroulée en ruines éparses. (...) Mais notre patrie veut se rejoindre...” (116). In reality, Ludwig II supported Wilhelm I in becoming the first Emperor of the German Empire.

in conveying the King's distaste for his own masculinity and his embrace of presexual innocence than the first pages of the second part, where the character makes his belated first appearance:

À la cime blanche d'un mont, dans la pâle et froide Thuringe, un jeune pâtre debout sur une pente de neige jouait de la flûte dans le matin.

Devant lui, plus bas que lui, le cirque énorme des Alpes, étagé de granits, hérissé de sapins, prolongeait ses inclinaisons jusqu'au fond des précipices blêmes que voile une vapeur ; et, sous l'azur vague où ça et là s'étirent des nuées, dans le vent silencieux qui emporte parfois des volutes de flocons éparpillés en poussière, le soleil de janvier illuminait les roches glacées, allumait le mica des neiges et faisait, au pointes des branches, resplendir comme de petits lustres, des pendeloques de grésil.

Svelte et grand, pâle, sous des cheveux noirs en boucles, ayant dans ses yeux très bleus une profondeur de lac ou de ciel, — pareil à quelque belle jeune femme, — le pâtre était debout sur la hauteur, seul dans l'immense isolement ; tout vêtu de fourrures blanches, c'était comme s'il avait neigé sur lui.

L'air qu'il jouait, lent, pur, ininterrompu de silences, s'égrenait dans la solitude, en rares perles froides, semblables aux gouttes d'une source gelée qui fond. (101)

In this short excerpt, the predominance of the color white is striking and finds itself reflected in a snowy landscape which serves as the perfect backdrop to a young flute-playing shepherd who is in fact the King himself. And yet the sheer abundance of white objects and metaphors of purity is so overwhelming as to suggest something more sinister lurking beneath the glittering icy surface. This display of virginity is indeed so emphatic as to become threatening.

A couple of intertextual comparisons can help unlock the subtle parodic intent at play in this excerpt. First, there is the possibility that Mendès may have been alluding to the third scene of Act I of *Tannhäuser*, where another herdsman plays the flute before he is interrupted by the arrival of pilgrims on their way to Rome. In Wagner's text, however, the surrounding nature is almost like a pastoral cliché, complete with green valley, blue sky and sun shining bright. His boy shepherd, meanwhile, does sing a folk tune of a sentimental bent, one that is rather more comforting than Frédéric's unwelcoming “rares perles froides.” The overall impression in *Tannhäuser* is one of calm before the storm, a promising picture of happiness for the protagonist who aspires to a simple virtuous life on earth. But his efforts, as will be revealed in the next act,

are bound to fail once the truth of his former sexual relationship with the goddess Venus arises. In choosing a frozen vista that is the exact reverse of Wagner's greenery and in making an adult protagonist of noble birth play the role of the peasant boy flutist, Mendès may have deliberately created a Wagnerian satire, one made all the more possible by the fact that the King consumes vast quantities of Wagnerian music in the privacy of his artificial grotto, itself modeled after the *Venusberg* from the first act of *Tannhäuser*.⁴⁹

With such poetic images as the *azur*, the mountain tops (*cime*) and the overall atmosphere of purity and whiteness, the second likely influence is Mallarmé. As a devoted friend and admirer, Mendès had published ten of Mallarmé's poems in the first issue of *Le Parnasse contemporain* in 1866, among which was "L'Azur." In that poem, Mallarmé wrote of being "haunted" by the *azur*, a term he chose in reference not just to the skies but to the heavens, which, according to Jean-Pierre Richard, is shorthand for the fantasy of primeval unity:

Dans cet éden d'azur continu, où n'existent ni distance entre les êtres ni obstacle entre les objets, les divers moments de la durée ne se séparent pas non plus les uns des autres. Point encore ici de différence entre l'avant et l'après, le rêvé et l'accompli ; l'existence réelle ne fait qu'un avec l'existence virtuelle. Or cette unité, on le sait, sera bientôt perdue : la rêverie mallarméenne se divisera alors entre deux besoins contradictoires, elle se déchirera entre le goût de l'inaccompli, de l'enveloppé, du *vierge*, et le désir non moins violent d'actualiser cette virginité, de la manifester en-dehors d'elle, de la faire exister dans une durée et dans un monde, de la rendre *vivace*.⁵⁰ (*L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* 43)

If we are to apply Richard's concept of an "éden d'azur continu" (my emphasis) to Mendès's text, we can recognize a similar desire on the part of Frédérick to maintain a sense of continuity—in his case, the refusal to evolve away from childhood—and sameness at all costs due to his awareness of imminent loss. Immobility and solitude are thus erected as ramparts against the fundamental

⁴⁹ As a matter of fact, the grotto is not of Mendès's invention. Rather, it is still visible inside the Linderhof Palace and is known as the "Venus grotto."

⁵⁰ Richard's borrowing of the terms "le vierge" and "le vivace" stem from Mallarmé's celebrated poem "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui," itself featuring a swan caught in the ice, an image fit for the "Swan King" Ludwig II/Frédérick.

lack of constancy that is intrinsic not just to subjective identity but also to human relationships, chief among them, romantic entanglements.

Frédérick's solipsistic outlook on life crystallizes when in direct contact with music. Much like des Esseintes who finds that “la musique profane est un art de promiscuité lorsqu'on ne peut la lire chez soi, seul, ainsi qu'on lit un livre” (*À rebours* 327), Frédéric is only agreeable to playing or listening to music in solitude, as if to protect its sacredness from corruptive outside influences. That is in fact exactly what happens while he plays the flute. Although he is said to have been joined in his playing by a “Solitaire,” that is, a nightingale “que l'on entend quelquefois, que l'on ne voit jamais” who provides “une réponse de l'idéal au rêve,” the ensuing duet is likely only a product of his imagination (102). As such, this unheard music resembles Mallarmé's fondness for silent instruments in his poems and foreshadows Dujardin's incongruous use of harpsichords in the 1886 prose poem *À la gloire d'Antonia*.⁵¹ Similar to the mythological story of Narcissus with Echo, Frédéric's musical companion is merely a reflection of the self that is unable to provide the right conditions for an interpersonal exchange to take place.⁵² Indeed, with the entrance of Karl,—Frédérick's servant who could have been a possible listener—the fabulous duet companion vanishes and the music ends just as it was about to turn into performance.

Furthermore, this imaginary duet of the flute and the nightingale is also representative not just of Frédéric's mode of engaging with music as a whole but of his possessiveness towards Hans Hammer (Wagner). As a matter of fact, his love for Hammer's music is purely based on a fantasy, a dream of fixed musical perfection—the *vierge*—elevated in opposition to the unpredictable

⁵¹ On Mallarmé's silent instruments, see Peter Dayan's chapter “On the Evidence of Mallarmé's Music” in *Music Writing Literature* (63-78).

⁵² The theme of Narcissus is prominent in Symbolist fiction and poetry. See, for instance, Gourmont's essay “Dernière conséquence de l'idéalisme” in which he describes the mock relationship between Narcissus and Echo: “Mais, à défaut de l'objet-pensée, Narcisse s'amuse encore à interpeller la patience muette des rochers et la bruissante sympathie des arbres, il a créé Echo. Echo est la pensée en laquelle il peut vivre : il la nie et il meurt” (*Mercure de France* X (March 1894) 200).

realities of performance—the *vivace*. Each exposure to “Hammerian” music fulfills Frédéric's need for transcendence because it never fails to transport him into a Platonic realm of Ideas that exists outside of human time, as Wagner's pianistic renderings of his music drama did to Mendès back in 1869: “les ailes de la musique l'emportaient parmi l'illusion des formes sans corps et des baisers sans lèvres” (165). But, as the reference to kisses suggests, the King is still hoping for a form of love—albeit a divine one—to welcome him there. This desire is apparent in the way he treats Hammer and his music, both of which he adores with an intensity that is suspicious, as epitomized by his controversial statement to Karl: “Il faut que je reste roi pour que Hans Hammer soit dieu” (109). This devotion, of course, is misunderstood by the public, and such outward favor toward the composer turns Frédéric into an object of mockery with an infantilizing nickname—“le fiancé de la musique”—to boot. (42) This barb is especially sacrilegious because it places Frédéric's pious devotion to music in the same category as a sex scandal involving his grandfather.

As a *roman à clef* that frequently alludes to real characters and historical events, *Le Roi vierge* makes use, for dramatic purposes, of a previous incident that ripped apart the Bavarian court in the late 1840s, implying that history is bound to repeat itself before deceiving the reader's expectations. Based on the liaison of Ludwig I of Bavaria (1786-1868) and the Irish-born entertainer Lola Montez (1821-1861), the character of “Mona Kharis” and her contentious legacy in Nonnenbourg are invoked throughout the novel, oftentimes in connection to Gloriane. Repeatedly, Kharis is described as a fantastical creature of androgynous appearance, a woman who weaponizes her sexuality in order to get involved in politics as a *de facto* ruler: “avare comme une courtisane, hardie comme un jeune homme, séduisante comme une fée, [elle] avait traversé l'Europe en ruinant les millionnaires, en souffletant les gendarmes et en charmant les poètes, dans

un éblouissement de jupe pailletée lancée au ciel d'un coup de pied, et dans un bruit de castagnettes d'or" (88). For a time, it seems evident that Gloriane is about to take Kharis's mantle and become the new King's mistress. After all, in one of her first appearances in the novel, she was presented to the reader as "une reine qui traverserait sa capitale le lendemain d'un massacre, haïe et triomphante" (61). However, she is much too "feminine,"—that is, from a misogynistic late nineteenth-century perspective, irrational, unfocused and overtly sensual—to take on the "masculine" qualities Mendès associated with Montez/Kharis's laser-like focus and ambition. This is reflected in her failure to seduce the King in part 3 (entitled "Frédérick et Gloriane"), to which I will return shortly.

The fact is that there is already a Mona Kharis in sheep's clothing at court who is none other than Hans Hammer. Similar to the Montez reference, this case of influence is based on Wagner and Ludwig II's close friendship and the gossip it provoked. When Wagner moved to Munich in 1864, a few months past Ludwig II's accession to the throne, he was quick to attract jealousy from the locals because of the King's outlandish generosity towards him. Having settled into a patrician house in a fashionable district—which, coincidentally, was not far removed from Lola Montez's former home—he was given a large allowance for the completion of the *Ring* cycle and lived rather lavishly.⁵³ Sensing the King's profound attachment to him, Wagner's enemies were soon to call him "the Second Lola" and even "Lolotte," thus linking him explicitly to Lola Montez. These comparisons were well calibrated to hurt since their friendship did include a strong homoerotic component. Indeed, Wagner himself wrote of his first encounter with the King: "Our meeting yesterday was one great love-scene which seemed as though it would never end" (*Selected*

⁵³ All of this biographical information stems from Christopher McIntosh's biography of Ludwig II, *The Swan King: Ludwig II of Bavaria* (46-47).

Letters 600).⁵⁴ The King's subsequent letters to Wagner between 1864 and 1865 have been characterized by Laurence Dreyfus as documents that “blaze with the scorching heat of homophile passion” with Wagner's responses “more muted in tone and passion, but equally crammed with pretentious prose” (*Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* 197-198). In essence, theirs was a Friendship with a capital F and one marked by the heritage of German Romanticism where the ideal of the androgyne—a remnant from the Greeks—was promoted by poets such as Novalis and thinkers like Schlegel.

Mendès's fictional reimagining of Hans Hammer and Frédérick's first encounter does in fact resemble the “love scene” Wagner spoke of in his letter, only with the added twist that it is entirely one-sided, as befits a *héros célibataire*. From a narrative standpoint, it also constitutes the positive counterpoint to the primal scene witnessed by the King. In the wake of his discovery of sexuality, Frédérick flees from the castle of Lilienbourg where he had spent his adolescence—and had dangerously begun to fall for the young archduchess Lisi—before he stumbles upon an ongoing Passion scene in Oberammergau which inspires in him a sudden religious vocation.⁵⁵ However, two subsequent encounters at an inn where he has sought refuge for the night—one with the “abbé Glinck” (Liszt), the other with “Hans Hammer” (Wagner)—challenge his desire to begin his novitiate at once.

In Mendès's account, both composers arguably represent contradictory artistic—and sexual—poles: the first courting adulation and female companionship, the second being reticent to engage socially. While Glinck sports the outward attire of a religious man, he is still prone to

⁵⁴ See Wagner's letter to Mathilde Maier from May 5, 1864: “Unsere gestrige Zusammenkunft war eine große, nicht enden wollende Liebesszene” (*Richard Wagner an Mathilde Maier (1862-1878)* 155). The letter is also quoted in Laurence Dreyfus's *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (197).

⁵⁵ The custom began in 1634 shortly after a plague had struck Oberammergau, and goes on to this day. Almost half of the villagers participate in the Passion play.

promiscuity—as “il avait pour les femmes trop décolletées des indulgences particulières” would indicate—and picks his sexual partners from the ever rotating pool of his adoring female students. (156) His demeanor is pleasant because he is confident that his reputation as Europe's greatest piano virtuoso precedes him wherever he goes: “Adoré, adulé, il daignait se montrer doux, presque bonhomme quoique un peu grave, poussait la grandeur jusqu'à la familiarité” (157). No such thing with Hammer. In fact, his first appearance is disruptive: “Frédérick tourna la tête et vit un des convives debout, serrant les poings, et dont les joues se crispaient en petites rides de colère—comme de l'eau remuée d'un vent—pendant que les débris d'une pile d'assiettes s'éparpillaient sur la table ou roulaient sur le carreau jusqu'à la plinthe des murailles” (160-161). The ensuing description of Hammer's physical appearance closely resembles the unflattering one provided by Mendès in his obituary for Wagner which I mentioned earlier in this chapter. It is noteworthy for its effeminacy—“une femme qui a ses nerfs”—and Hammer's concomitant childlike attributes—“la transparence ingénue des yeux—des yeux pareils à ceux d'un enfant ou d'une vierge—toute la belle candeur d'un rêve inviolé” (161). Needless to say, the similarities with Frédéric are legion and form the basis for a future connection to take place.

Conveniently, Hammer takes issue with Glinck's belief that the future king—Frédéric II who is watching them debate over his merits *incognito*—shall be a better patron of the arts than his predecessor. His diatribe against the German state and its lack of support for musicians like himself serves as a pretext for Mendès to pivot Germany against France and invoke Wagner's real-life nationalism, itself the cause of the dissolution of their friendship:

Le nouveau roi ne vaudra pas mieux que l'ancien. Qu'y aura-t-il de changé ? Un nom. Frédéric fera justement ce que Joseph a fait. Il présidera le conseil des ministres, passera des revues, et, dans ses loisirs, visitera les ateliers des peintres. Quant à la musique, il ne s'en inquiètera guère. Et pourtant, la musique, c'est le vrai art allemand ! L'Angleterre a Shakespeare, la France a Victor Hugo, l'Allemagne a Sébastien Bach, Beethoven et moi ! Sans la musique, pas de gloire allemande. Le drame lyrique est la réalisation suprême,

absolue, de notre idéal national ! (...) Plutôt que de rester en Allemagne, où les rois me refusent quelques misérables millions pour bâtir un théâtre, j'aimerais mieux aller... oui, ma foi, j'aimerais mieux revenir en France ! (161-162)

In this heated context, the mention of France is far from innocent; rather, it constitutes a proper insult against the future King of Bavaria.⁵⁶ And to top it all off, Hammer belittles him further by calling him “le petit Frédéric,” wishing him to have his coronation march composed by “quelque élève juif de Mendelssohn ou de Meyerbeer” before he departs.⁵⁷ (162)

But Frédéric does not take offense. Far from it. Once he hears the name of the composer who was just vituperating against him, he has the reaction of a love-struck man in awe of another's virility:

Quoi ! il venait de voir cet être fantasque et prodigieux, exalté et rabaissé, adoré et haï, qui, à force de génie et d'audace, avait secoué la léthargie allemande, avait imposé aux plus flegmatiques l'enthousiasme ou la colère, ce révolutionnaire qui s'était jeté à travers l'art, rompant les vieilles règles, ruinant les fausses gloires et violant l'antique musique pour engendrer en elle le drame vivant et palpitant, enfin Hans Hammer, ce fou, Hans Hammer, ce dieu ! (162)

Here Mendès's lexicon is full of images of subordination conveyed by such aggressive verbs as “secoué,” “imposé,” “jeté,” “rompant,” “ruinant,” “violant.” Altogether, they convey a tyrannical portrait of the artist, similar to Mallarmé's assessment of Wagnerian music as an assault against the poetic imagination in *Rêverie d'un poète français*, or Nietzsche's claim that Wagnerian music was a danger for public health: “Wagner ist ein grosser Verderb für die Musik. Er hat in ihr das Mittel errathen, müde Nerven zu reizen, —er hat die Musik damit krank gemacht” (*Der Fall Wagner* 15) / “Wagner represents a great corruption of music. He has guessed that it is a means to

⁵⁶ According to Cosima Wagner, Mendès did pride himself on his wartime patriotism in various letters: “Briefe von C. Mendès, sehr elegisch, er denkt zu sterben unter den Wällen von Paris” (*Die Tagebücher: 1869-1872* 284). / “Very elegiac letters from C. Mendès, he is thinking of dying under the Fortifications of Paris” (My translation).

⁵⁷ Mendès was well aware of Wagner's anti-Semitism, although it was not the cause of his break with the composer. In the “avant-propos” to his *Richard Wagner* from 1886, he mentions dining with a Hungarian Jewish banker who showed his distaste for the man while feeling admiration for the musician: “il était juif, et haïssait Wagner, à cause d'un livre sur les juifs; mais il était musicien, et il admirait Richard Wagner à cause des *Maîtres Chanteurs*” (V).

excite weary nerves—and with that he has made music sick” (*The Case of Wagner* 166).⁵⁸ Hammer, the oppressor, similarly imposes his dual artistic and political vision onto the King. The latter is so stunned by Hammer's demeanor he calls him a madman (“ce fou”) before settling on God (“ce dieu !”). Such is the language of French Wagnerism: the pendulum is quick to swing back from utmost impertinence to exaggerated adulation.

The rest of the paragraph is arguably an exercise in pastiching Wagner, with Mendès borrowing from Wagner's rhetoric and aesthetics. First, we have the mention of Wagner's long-endured sufferings, a direct nod to the martyr image he cultivated among his circle of admirers. As I showed in the prologue, Judith Gautier faithfully echoed this narrative in her articles, which suggests her then husband Mendès was familiar with it. Moreover, in calling his fictional Hammer “révolutionnaire,” he was also referencing Wagner's own iconoclastic language and perhaps even one of his most famous essays, *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849). Second, with the terrifying portrayal of Hammer as an Attila-like conqueror who does not shy away from rape (“violant (...) pour engendrer”) and destruction (“ruinant”) to achieve his artistic ends, we have a clear but distorted allusion to *Oper und Drama* (1851) where the birth of music drama is explained as the product of a heterosexual coupling:

Der nothwendige Drang des dichtenden Verstandes in diesem Dichten ist daher die Liebe—und zwar die Liebe des Mannes zum Weibe: nicht aber jene frivole, unzüchtige Liebe, in welcher 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. (...) Dieser zeugende Samen ist die dichterische Absicht, die dem herrlich liebenden Weibe Musik den Stoff zur Gebärung zuführt. (*Gesammelte Schriften* IV 128)

⁵⁸ See for instance the following passage from Mallarmé's *Richard Wagner: Rêverie d'un poète français*: “Vous avez à *subir* [my emphasis] un sortilège, pour l'accomplissement duquel ce n'est trop d'aucun moyen d'enchantement impliqué par la magie musicale, afin de *violenter* [my emphasis] votre raison aux prises avec un simulacre, et d'emblée on proclame : Supposez que cela a lieu véritablement et que vous y êtes !” (*Œuvres complètes* II 154) For a more detailed analysis, see my forthcoming article “La musique devenue Circé : Le différend érotique de Mallarmé et Wagner” in *Études Mallarmé* 6 (2018). Ed. Gordon Millan. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020.

The necessary urge of the poetic understanding in its poetic creating is thus love—the love of man for woman: not that frivolous unchaste love in which the man only seeks to satisfy himself through pleasure, but the deep longing to know himself redeemed from his selfishness in the joy that the loving woman shares with him, and this longing is the poetically creative factor of the understanding. (...) This begetting seed is the poetic intention that presents to the gloriously loving woman that is music the material for birthing. (trans. Maike Oergel in *The Return of King Arthur and the Nibelungen* 257)

As Mendès was to show in the article “Notes sur la théorie et l'œuvre wagnérienne” published four years later in the *Revue wagnérienne* (March 1885), this particular passage—along with the misogynistic allegories of French, Italian and German music as three distinctive female types⁵⁹—made a profound impression on him. He was also quite perceptive in designating it as the crux of Wagner's aesthetics: “Tout le système de Richard Wagner et l'œuvre qui en est issue sont exprimés par cette allégorie” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 31). But, as he freely admitted, he did not quote from *Oper und Drama* exactly, rather he rewrote the conception/birth scene to suit his more biblical interpretation: “Une fois le poète la vit [la musique] et la saisit. Habitée à l'isolement, à l'ombre, au mutisme, elle voulut d'abord lui résister ; mais il était le Mâle inévitable. ‘Tu enfanteras !’ lui dit-il. Et l'Harmonie, violentée par la Parole, enfanta le Drame musical” (31).⁶⁰ This significantly darker vision not only sheds light on the gender imbalance that was hinted at in the original, but it dramatically turns a consensual interaction into an act of sexual violence. In turn, this exegetic twist on Wagner's text aligns with Mendès's characterization of Hammer as an angry figure who could easily snap if contradicted.

Hammer's name itself—full of the same penetrative force and barbaric violence as the famous caricature where the German composer drills a hole through a bleeding French ear—

⁵⁹ In chapter VII of part I of *Oper und Drama*, Wagner allegorized Italian music as a courtesan, French music as a coquette and German music as a hypocritical prude. See Thomas S. Grey's discussion of those pages in *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (135-137).

⁶⁰ This passage echoes the famed verse from *Genesis* 3:16 which establishes Eve's subjugation to Adam: “To the woman He said: ‘I will sharply increase your pain in childbirth; in pain you will bring forth children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’”

participates in the construction of a masculine ideal worthy of a young King's ardor: “Pourquoi le nom de Hans Hammer le troublait-il ainsi ? (...) il était comme quelqu'un à qui vient d'arriver une chose fatale ou heureuse (...) Ce que doivent ressentir les autres hommes au premier aspect de celle qu'ils aimeront toute leur vie, il le sentait confusément...” (Idem). Contrary to Jérôme Solal's proposal that homosexuality in *Le Roi vierge* is mostly detectable in the final crucifixion scene, my contention is that it is already apparent in Frédérick's encounter with Wagner, as the passage I have just quoted can surely demonstrate.⁶¹ Further, these latent homosexual feelings are not just anecdotal nor do they solely belong to a fin-de-siècle fascination with sexual “deviance”; they symbolize the powerful appeal of Wagnerian music to the senses and the ambivalence such commanding feelings can create in the listener.⁶² The tragedy of Frédérick is that he finds Hammer's erotics deeply attractive—to the point of cultivating a full-fledged obsession with the works themselves—but is also in denial with regard to the connection between music and sex. Arguably, this refusal mirrors the King's choice to “stay in the closet” with regard to his homosexual desires.

Indeed, both musical and homosexual awakenings occur concurrently in the next scene. Having followed Hammer to his bedroom upstairs—without the latter's knowledge—Frédérick listens to an impromptu pianistic rendition of the greatest hits—“les thèmes principaux du ‘Chevalier Klindor,’ [*Parsifal*], du ‘Chevalier au Cygne,’ [*Lohengrin*] des ‘Maîtres Chanteurs d'Eisenach,’ [*Die Meistersinger*] de ‘Floris et Blancheflor’ [*Tristan und Isolde*]—behind the door.

⁶¹ Solal discusses the motif of homosexuality in a footnote: “Le motif homosexuel, refoulé, n'est toutefois pas absent du livre et parcourt en filigrane le récit de cette abstinence volontaire. La scène de la mort du roi en constitue sans doute l'expression la plus claire” (“Mendès et les lois de la transgression” 172).

⁶² I use the word “deviance” in order to allude to the medicalization of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century. Charcot, for instance, saw male homosexuality as a “disease” that could be cured with good hygiene, which included contact with female bodies, bromide, or cold showers. See Florence Tamagne, *Histoire de l'homosexualité en Europe: Berlin, Londres, Paris, 1919-1939* (234-235). Like Baudelaire, the depiction of homosexuality in Mendès's oeuvre is mostly confined to lesbianism as seen through the objectifying prism of a heterosexual male writer. See, for instance, the novel *Méphistophéla* (1890) which is discussed in Solal's aforementioned article.

(163) Once again, the musical execution is notable for its violent undertones and its potent sensuality, the same combination of subjugation and ecstasy described by Baudelaire in his 1860 letter to Wagner:

Un accord, violemment frappé sur un clavecin, retentit dans le silence de l'auberge (...) Les sons se précipitaient, brutaux, discordants, farouches ; la colère de Hans Hammer se répandait dans la furie de l'improvisation, et il jouait du piano comme on battrait quelqu'un. Mais ce bruyant emportement, peu à peu, s'apaisa, torrent continué en un vaste et beau fleuve ; et le courant de la mélodie aux flots bien rythmés se prolongeait infiniment. (...) La musique l'enveloppait comme une chaude buée où la chair se dilate ; il lui semblait aussi qu'elle pénétrait en lui comme une boisson véhémence qui fortifie les nerfs et fait s'épanouir l'esprit. Jamais il n'avait connu de telles délices ; une fièvre l'envahissait, une fièvre exquise ; il vivait une vie nouvelle... (Idem)

The intensity of the scene is redolent of the previously quoted descriptions of Wagner's real-life pianistic performances, where Villiers wrote of the devastating effects of a two-hour session on the emotional well-being of his audience (“parce qu’au bout de deux heures, nous sommes réellement malades.”) As Mendès's mention of music-induced fever—“fièvre exquise”—would suggest, it is possible to envisage this passage as the metaphorical inoculation of the Wagnerian virus into the King's body, turning a vulnerable youngster into a truly (love-)sick man. In short, Hammer has shown the King an artificial way of channeling his detested libido into a higher artistic purpose, an act of Freudian sublimation, if you will. He has thus provided him with the ultimate form of escape from his regal duties, chief among them the production of an heir.

Having understood his life purpose to be the facilitation of Hammer's artistic desires, Frédérick returns to Nonnenbourg after years of absence and summons the composer to court. Coincidentally, that is also the moment where he accepts his destiny as King. Only his refusal to marry—and his rejection of Lisi who returns to him before dying of a broken heart in part 2—points to Frédérick's enduring fear of becoming not just a sovereign but a man. Instead, he delegates the dominant role to Hammer: “Le roi, ce n'était pas Frédérick, c'était Hans Hammer”

(164). Something has become rotten in the state of Thuringia. Enter a network of shadowy conspirators: the King's mother Thécla, the scheming countess of Soïnoff and an odd little man from Toulouse named Brascassou who just so happens to be the manager and occasional lover of the new diva in fashion, Gloriane Gloriani. Their various interests are able to merge together as they prop the singer up to become the King's mistress. However, their plans are thwarted once the King refuses to fall for her and denies both himself and his subjects the hope for sexual and political normalcy.

If part 2 of *Le Roi vierge* revolves around the figure of Frédérick, part 1 is in fact dedicated to Gloriane. Although she is introduced to the reader as a diva on the verge of achieving mass success, we soon learn that she used to live more modestly in Pamplona, where she met the wandering factotum Brascassou. There, she lived a promiscuous life as the notorious outcast La Frascuèla, a woman rumored to have caused the deaths of the men who sought out her embrace.⁶³

For all of her sensual appetite and extraordinary beauty, however, Brascassou soon notices that la Frascuèla is far from conniving, or even dangerous. In fact, once she is satiated, she resembles “une lionne repue” more imposing than fearsome. (77) From the beginning, Mendès seems to suggest she is in fact a mythical creature defined by her allure and endless curiosity about all things sexual, as can be inferred from her confession to her newest lover, Brascassou: “Ma vie me donne l'impression d'une continuité toujours pareille. Il me semble que je n'ai pas eu de commencement” (70). However, her discovery of music prompts a profound shift in identity and destroys this illusion of sameness, this paradoxical *vierge* she cultivated in her life just like Frédérick, albeit with sex rather than chastity. As Gloriane, a performer in full possession of her

⁶³ Here there is a possible intertextual parallel to be made between La Frascuèla/Gloriane and Kundry, the seductress in *Parsifal* who also wounds the men who have come into sexual contact with her. At any rate, the character of Gloriane certainly belongs to the category of the fin-de-siècle femme fatale, one made all the more terrifying due to growing paranoia with respect to sexually transmitted diseases and a corresponding longing for a hygienic lifestyle.

instrument, she learns to embrace the *vivace* and turns her attentions from all men to a single man, Frédérick himself.

Similar to Frédérick, la Frascuèla's musical awakening is prompted by violence. Her vocation as a singer, Mendès provocatively implies, relies on the connection she makes between brutality and sexual gratification. As she recalls to Brascassou, she already entertained this warped notion as a young girl who felt attracted to Christian martyr imagery: “Je grimpais sur une chaise, sur un meuble, pour atteindre les vivantes images, et je collais mes lèvres aux bras nus, aux beaux visages, haïssant les peintures de ne pas me rendre mon baiser, égratignant la toile plate qui ne voulait pas se plier à mon enlacement” (71). This adolescent yearning soon evolves into an abusive relationship with a bullfighter: “Il me battait quand il était ivre; je lui versais à boire, le trouvant plus beau dans la colère” (75). But she eventually leaves him and, for a time, it seems as if she has succeeded in taking on the dominant role with her partners: “Conquérante insatiable, je me suis approprié les âmes et les sens d'une multitude; je la tiens vaincue et pantelante sous la rage despotique de mon baiser” (76). However, with the arrival of the cunning Brascassou, this state of affairs is imperiled. Sensing her concomitant longing for love and pain, he insinuates himself into her life by cleaning up her house, putting her things in order and combing her hair. All of this he does in addition to maintaining a sexual relationship which is frequently punctuated with incidents of domestic abuse.

This toxic mixture of brutality and codependency comes to its apex one evening where Brascassou pushes his beating to new extremes. The pain is so intense as to provoke an uninterrupted howl from his victim:

Il y eut un hasard heureux. Un soir que Brascassou la battait plus rudement que de coutume, la Frascuèla poussa un cri aigu, prolongé, retentissant. “Biédaze ! tu as de la voix !” dit-il. Il la fit chanter, bien qu'elle pleurât. Une voix magnifique en effet qui, des notes profondes

des contralti montait aux accents éperdus des soprani les plus élevés. Brascassou dit : “J'aurai des rentes.”

Il l'emmena en France, à Toulouse (...) La Frascuèla, se laissant faire, eut des maîtres, suivit les cours du Conservatoire, s'ennuya d'abord de ses études. Mais le démon des sons la saisit aux entrailles. La volupté des mélodies l'enlaçait comme des bras vivants ; elle se pâmait parmi le bercement des harmonies. Elle se jeta dans la musique comme dans un lit de chaudes luxures, et, furieuse artiste tout imbue des ardeurs de la femme, elle fut la prostituée frénétique de l'art. (80-81)

Here it is likely Mendès derived inspiration from the legend surrounding the Romantic diva Maria Malibran and exaggerated her story in order to highlight its more disturbing elements.⁶⁴ Taught by her father, the renowned Rossinian tenor Manuel García, she was said to be able to sing steadily through her tears, a skill she once explained to an inquiring listener: “lorsque j'étais enfant, je pleurais souvent en prenant ma leçon, et comme j'avais une peur excessive que papa ne s'en aperçut, je me plaçais derrière lui et je pris l'habitude insensiblement de maîtriser le son de ma voix tandis que mes larmes coulaient” (*Maria Malibran: La Diva romantique* 40). Although García disputed his reputation as a rough pedagogue who did not hesitate to strike his daughter when she failed to produce the sounds he desired, he allegedly claimed harsh treatment at the hands of a teacher was necessary for the production of artistic greatness: “Maria ne pourra être un jour une grande artiste qu'à ce prix. Son caractère indomptable a besoin d'une main de fer pour la conduire...” (41). Another element redolent of Malibran in this scene is the trademark wide tessitura, from the depths of the contralto chest notes to the piercing head voice of the soprano. La Frascuèla's tormentor is swift to understand that this extraordinary range bears the promise of a wide open and therefore lucrative vocal future: from lower-voice trouser roles to high-pitched

⁶⁴ Maria Malibran (1808-1836) was a renowned mezzo-soprano particularly celebrated for her interpretations of Italian *bel canto*. Her intensity as an actress and wide vocal range cemented her status as a bona fide Romantic diva. However, it was her untimely death after a fall from her horse that turned her into a literary heroine, with Musset's *Stances à la Malibran* being the best example of her canonization.

ingénues, she will be able to do it all.⁶⁵ These formidable vocal abilities coupled with her newly ardent passion for music have turned la Frascuèla not into a saintly Malibran figure, but rather into her satanic reverse, Gloriane, “la prostituée frénétique de l'art.”

In the wake of a star-making Parisian performance in the title role of *La Cortigiana innamorata*—Mendès's fictional name for *La traviata* by Verdi—Gloriane is invited to Nonnenbourg where she is scheduled to sing the part of Blancheflor (Isolde). Although she and Brascassou may be under the impression that she was hired for her talents only, it is because of her likeness to the Empress Eugénie—with whom Frédérick chastely fell in love after a sighting a few years prior—that she is brought over by a confederacy of plotters. Since Eugénie was the only woman whom the King professed to love publicly, it is hoped he will fall for Gloriane once he watches her sing his favorite composer's music and will subsequently rid himself of his encumbering virginity, the first step towards accepting his role as a man and sovereign.

The long-awaited performance of *Floris et Blancheflor* finally occurs in part 3 of *Le Roi vierge* and is retold from the vantage point of Gloriane (chapter 1) followed by Frédérick's perspective (chapter 2).⁶⁶ In Gloriane's account, the sting of illicit sexual desire—of Isolde toward Tristan which is mirrored in her longing for an inaccessible King—together with the score's famed stretching of the rules of harmony⁶⁷ and its daunting vocal demands add up to extreme weariness:

⁶⁵ Malibran was famously capable of singing both Arsace (a contralto trouser role) and the queen Semiramide (a soprano) in Rossini's *Semiramide* thus embodying two vocal extremes. This earned her the unofficial title of *diva assoluta*, a term that was to be used again for Maria Callas.

⁶⁶ Mendès's new title for *Tristan und Isolde* is in fact a reference to a medieval romance called *Floire et Blancheflor* made popular in the thirteenth century. It enjoyed a revival in the nineteenth century thanks to the work of the philologist Édélestand du Méril who published a critical edition in 1856 entitled *Floire et Blanceflor, poèmes du XIII^e siècle, publiés d'après les manuscrits avec une introduction, des notes et un glossaire*.

⁶⁷ The “Tristan chord” is often credited as the first instance where a Western composer pushed the limits of classical tonal harmony in order to flirt with atonality. As Roger Scruton notes, that reputation is due to “later developments and in particular by Debussy's experimental approach to keys and scales; by the polytonality of Stravinsky, Bartók, and Szymanowski; by the atonal expressionism of Schoenberg; and by the same composer's attempts to break with tonality entirely through the twelve-tone serial system. Doubtless none of those experiments would have occurred had it not been for *Tristan*” (*Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* 79).

Après le troisième acte, Gloriane Gloriani, ramassant sa robe et ses cheveux, sanglotante encore de l'extatique désespoir de Blancheflor, se jeta dans sa loge et cria :

— Brascassou ! je suis folle, et brisée. Cette musique me soûle et m'éreinte. Quand j'ai chanté je suis comme si j'avais été battue, — mais battue par quelqu'un que j'adorerais. Donne-moi un verre d'eau, j'ai de la braise dans la gorge. (167)

Musical intoxication and physical suffering go hand in hand in her description, as they did for the creator of the role of Tristan himself, Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld, who died at the age of twenty-nine less than three weeks after having performed in *Tristan und Isolde*. With Tristan's real-life passing, it became part of the Wagnerian folklore to speak of the torments endured by singers who have to stand on the stage for hours on end in order to pour out incandescent vocals over an eighty-five-person orchestra. Gloriane is thus certainly not alone in finding such a part to be taxing on her vocal and emotional health. For all of its difficulties, however, she readily admits that singing Blancheflor (Isolde) is also an intensely rewarding experience, with pain and pleasure merging together. In a sense, this character provides Gloriane with an opportunity to see her dark romantic fantasies come true during the short spell of a four-hour performance.

The rest of Gloriane's impressions center on the theater itself and the lone spectator gazing at the singers in the dark with a watchful eye: “Et puis cette salle vide et sombre, c'est terrible. On dirait qu'on chante au bord d'un abîme, et, dans le fond de ce gouffre obscur, on ne voit rien, sinon une pâle et belle figure qui regarde fixement, avec des yeux où tout le ciel s'est réfugié. Il est beau ce jeune roi !” (167) If the “abîme” (abyss) was the term used by Wagner to depict von Carolsfeld's demise—as he did in a self-flagellating passage from his diary—it also hints at the specificities of the Bayreuth theater itself which Mendès had visited on numerous occasions for the world premiere of the *Ring* cycle and opening of the Festival in 1876.⁶⁸ Conceived as a theatrical black box, the Festspielhaus differentiated itself from other opera houses because of its demonstrably

⁶⁸ As seen in *Das Braune Buch*: “I drove you to the abyss!” Quoted in Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (31).

more egalitarian seating arrangement and unostentatious timber structure.⁶⁹ Most dramatically, Wagner required complete darkness during the performance and demanded an invisible orchestra pit, covered with a hood so as to create the conditions for cinematic-like illusionism to take place. As Mendès implied in his review of the 1876 Bayreuth festivities, Wagner's theater was the exact reverse of the Palais Garnier's "window display" of its wealthy audience members: "La scène seule sera splendidement illuminée; car c'est une nécessité de l'œuvre wagnérienne qu'il faudra la voir et l'entendre, et non pas regarder ceux qui l'écouteront" (*Le Gaulois* August 17, 1876). Although the fictional theater in *Le Roi vierge* is not the Festspielhaus, the King's solitary enjoyment of Wagnerian music with the lights out and his insistence on maintaining a theatrical illusion in all aspects of his life are a hyperbolic application of Bayreuthian principles.⁷⁰ The fact that he privately enjoys a theater meant for the edification of the people directly contradicts the composer's intentions. Or, more intriguingly, it pokes holes through Wagner's democratic rhetoric for the arts in order to perhaps reveal his elitism as well as his attachment to a monarchic system.⁷¹

Once the narrative focus switches to Frédérick, it becomes apparent that his attachment to Wagner's music and aesthetics is purely narcissistic and constitutes a distortion of the works' avowed purpose, which is one of collective revelation through aesthetic contemplation. The conflict opposing Hans Hammer—the composer of the German people—to Frédérick—the lone

⁶⁹ However, there is a royal box at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus which was meant to lure Ludwig II into attending future performances. Far from being "communist," as his earlier writings and his earlier ties with socialists like Bakunin would suggest, Wagner thus demonstrated he was comfortable with having an enlightened monarch (Ludwig II) preside over the *Volk*.

⁷⁰ In fact, Mendès does allude to Bayreuth earlier in the novel at the beginning of part 2 where Karl warns the King of growing hostility towards Hammer: "il est probable que les nouveaux députés refuseront à votre ministre des beaux-arts le crédit de quatorze millions qui permettrait de bâtir le théâtre de Hans Hammer..." (103).

⁷¹ Mendès himself had more republican sympathies. In 1871, he published his own hagiographic account of what went on during the Paris commune, *Les 73 journées de la Commune*. His glorification of the sufferings and exploits of the Parisian people helps explain why he was so particularly hurt by Wagner's vaudeville *Eine Kapitulation*, a text that showed Parisians to be more ridiculous in their misery than truly grand.

Thuringian King who seeks escapism above all—is brewing and escalates with Gloriane's highly idiosyncratic turn as Isolde.

As a gifted singing actress, her complete appropriation of this intimidating role is a tour de force. It is so formidable an interpretation, in fact, as to petrify the King who is not used to such agency from a performer, least of all a female singer:

C'était vrai, elle avait épouventé Frédérick. Chantée par Gloriane, la musique de Hans Hammer avait une signification nouvelle, étrangement inquiétante ; elle demeurait idéale, mais devenait terrible ; il se produisait comme un revirement de lointain : avec la même profondeur, ce n'était plus l'abîme d'en haut, c'était le gouffre d'en bas, la chute prodigieuse au lieu de la surnaturelle élévation, le paradis renversé en enfer. Pourquoi ? Comment ? À cause de la chair splendide, des cheveux fauves et de cette voix profonde, grasse, rauque un peu, qui a l'air de râler, quoique douce. Ce qui troubla surtout le roi de Thuringe, ce fut la ressemblance de la Frascuèla avec la reine qui était pour lui l'objet d'un si chaste culte. De quel droit ce démon parodiait-il cet ange ? Dans quel dessein de tentation, une égale beauté, si différente et si pareille, avait-elle été donnée à deux êtres, l'un divin, l'autre démoniaque ? Est-ce que Satan est Dieu aussi ? (169)

With Gloriane taking on the role of the “demon” to a sexless angelic Eugénie, her “satanic” arc is now complete.⁷² By putting Blancheflor's desire for Floris front and center, she has in effect given voice to a woman's sexual desire in a way that stuns the King who is well versed in the art of divorcing sexuality from personhood. Yet Gloriane's emphasis on Blancheflor's sensuality is based on a faithful reading of the work, one that Frédérick has been willfully avoiding and now has to confront. Indeed, *Tristan* is famed for its vivid musical portrayals of sexual desire, as for instance in the love duet between the lovers in Act 2, which has been subject to wild speculation over the number of “orgasms” it is supposed to musically depict.⁷³ In sum, what Gloriane accomplishes with her performance is the disclosure of just how much Hammerian/Wagnerian music depends

⁷² Incidentally, this is the same dichotomy central to *Tannhäuser* where the goddess Venus and the chaste Elisabeth both share the eponymous character's affections.

⁷³ Barry Millington's analysis of Act 2 includes a numbering of supposed musical climaxes. See *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas* (78-81).

on the libido of the spectator for maximum aesthetic and emotional impact.⁷⁴ And this is exactly what precipitates the King's fall, his idealized Hammerian system being revealed as a sham just as much as his chosen identity as an asexual man.

Thus Frédérick steadily holds on to his chaste interpretation of Hammer's works and effectively protests by escaping from the theater once he sees his take challenged by Gloriane. This reluctance can be explained according to the logic of addiction and the pursuit of sameness: in order to deliver the same emotional highs that it imparted to him the first time, the music Frédérick so loves must remain fixed—*vierge* at all costs—and not be contaminated by the *vivace* of his personal longings or the fancy of performers. Yet he is lying to himself to some degree: his horror at seeing an Empress lookalike enact her sexual agency on the stage—which he characterizes as a “parody” (“De quel droit ce démon parodiait-il cet ange ?”), a term reserved for the mockery of something already beloved—suggests he may have portrayed Blancheflor as Eugénie before. This type of projection is all too common in nineteenth-century novels where the actress serves as a vehicle for various types of male sexual fantasies. But with *Le Roi vierge*, and later with Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte*, there are deadly consequences for female performers who refuse to conform and dare break out of the illusion by emphasizing their individuality.

At any rate, the stage is now ready for the final confrontation to take place. It begins with the irruption of Gloriane in Frédérick's sanctuary of the Venus grotto. Her attempt at seduction begins under the pretense that she is still Blancheflor—and not an impersonator—who can make the mirage of ardent romantic love come to reality:

⁷⁴ This is the central thesis of Laurence Dreyfus's *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* where he argues that Richard Wagner had “more than anyone else in the nineteenth century made plain his relentless fixation on sexual desire, a fixation documented in private correspondence, personal diaries, published essays, and, of course, in his operas and music dramas. Wagner's obsession with sex also sparked a remarkable reaction to his works, which, in its public parade of the issue, changed the course of European music history” (1).

Tu ne me reconnais pas ? Je t'adore. La grande reine qui t'a charmé, c'est moi ! et Blancheflor, ivre du breuvage d'amour, qui s'endort, extasiée, sous le manteau de Floris, et qui meurt, sanglotante, en mettant son âme aux lèvres du bien-aimé cadavre, c'est moi, c'est moi ! Tu n'as donc rien compris, ce soir, rien deviné ? Tu étais dans l'ombre, au fond de ta loge, mais je te voyais. Je sentais ta présence sur moi comme une délicieuse caresse ; souvent j'avais envie de baiser mes bras, quand il me semblait que tu les avais regardés ! Je suis terrible, n'est-ce pas ? Jamais tu n'avais entendu une Blancheflor aussi ardemment éprise ? C'est que tu étais là, c'est que je parlais à toi, à toi, entends-tu ? et non à ce comédien stupide qui s'effarait dans mes embrassements et s'étonnait de mes baisers, ne sachant pas que, sur sa bouche, je dévorais la tienne. (170-171)

Besides its confession of sexual attraction and desire, Gloriane's retelling of her performance is noteworthy for its central act of substitution. Indeed, her guiding light in her passionate rendition of Blancheflor, she claims, was to operate a mental transfer that effectively turned a tepid Floris into an idealized King whom she vampirizes with her kiss.⁷⁵ This process, I would like to argue, is reminiscent of the creative mechanism underpinning Mallarmé's mental theater, especially so with respect to ballet. Just as “la danseuse *n'est pas une femme qui danse* (...) elle *n'est pas une femme*, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme,” the male singer is effectively cancelled out as an individual—and so, most controversially, is the King—in order to become a potent poetic symbol, in this case, of eroticism itself. (*Œuvres complètes* II 171) This, as we can see, is highly troubling for a man who has long denied his own sexuality and refuses to acknowledge music's potential for carrying any erotic charge.

As Gloriane attempts to ensnare the King with “l'or fluide de ses cheveux,” he retaliates viciously. The long celebrated *topos* of the woman's hair—the alluringly tentacular “chevelure”—is another point of congruence between *Le Roi vierge* and *Bruges-la-Morte*, where Hugues Viane kills his lover, the dancer Jane Scott, with a braid belonging to his deceased wife. Gloriane's hair, however, is fiercely her own and its golden color is characterized as a “flamme” throughout the

⁷⁵ The female vampire is present in nineteenth-century fiction as another variation on the femme fatale trope. See Bram Dijkstra's chapter “Metamorphoses of the Vampire: Dracula and His Daughters” in *Idols of Perversity* (333-351).

novel, a fire analogy that corresponds to her sexualized understanding of Hammer's music as "chante[r] du feu" (167). Faced with a female artist who refuses to conform to his vision of Blancheflor as a chaste princess, the King feels personally violated in his morals and beliefs, and chooses to stab her in a reversed act of penetration.

Feeling cornered, he then runs off to witness the death of his would-be fiancée Lisi and feels himself troubled by guilt over his responsibility in her demise.⁷⁶ Yet Frédérick is unwilling to relinquish the lie of his lack of interest in sex, castrates himself in despair, and sets fire to his castle in hopes that the immolation will purify the site desecrated by his growing sexual desires. As he is wont to do, he flees the scene of the crime and runs back to Oberammergau, the previous scene of a religious epiphany that was interrupted by his encounter with Hammer. There, he demands an exceptional staging of the Passion from the villagers and takes on the role of Jesus, thereby accepting to become a performer able to compete with Hammer and Gloriane in the assertion of his artistic vision. For the first time in the novel, the King consents to having an audience, possibly because he rests assured that the performance will follow a scripted routine and will not be derailed by the whims of others.

This final scene from *Le Roi vierge* consolidates Frédérick's deadly confusion of fiction and reality and punishes him for maintaining that his personal interpretation be adopted by all around him:

⁷⁶ The cause of Lisi's death is consumption, which was brought about by her fall into cold waters after Frédérick pushed her off a boat inside the Venus grotto in part 2. The story is based on an urban legend involving Ludwig II and one of his favorite Wagnerian singers, Josephine Schefsky, which is recounted by Frances A. Gerard in *The Romance of King Ludwig II of Bavaria; His Relations with Wagner and His Bavarian Fairy Places* (1901): "Fräulein Schefszky was occasionally asked to sing for his Majesty in the Winter Garden while he rowed on the lake. On one occasion he condescended to row her in his boat; the lady being more of a Walküre than a fairy, her weight was too much for the little skiff, which capsized into the water. It was said that this was a tentative measure of the singer's part to see whether the King could be roused to some demonstration of tenderness. The King, however, left the lady to the care of the boatman and hurriedly made his escape" (163). Incidentally, Ludwig II died in 1886 by falling off his boat into the shallow waters of Lake Starnberg. To this day, it is unclear whether he committed suicide or was murdered.

Quoi ! tout ceci n'était donc pas un jeu ? le soldat romain avait vraiment enfoncé la lance dans le flanc du crucifié ! Un homme venait de mourir véritablement ? De tous côtés, sur le théâtre, sur la colline et dans la plaine, s'était fait un sinistre silence, et tous les yeux agrandis par l'effroi considéraient le jeune homme expiré qui se détachait si pâle sur la gloire flamboyante du couchant... (184)

No more simulacrum this time: the King dies a modern-day Jesus for the cause of the separation of art from sexuality. Thus, according to the satirical logic of French Wagnerism, theatrical illusionism results in absurd consequences for the fanatic believer who dares apply its grand scope and extreme emotional range to life. All things considered, it is just as pathetic an ending as Daniel Prince's lack of sexual success with Léa in *Les Lauriers sont coupés*—and the implication that he is bound to repeat the same process again and again—and Valbert's sure death from consumption at a point where he is finally pleased with his romantic life.

However, Mendès's use of sacred Christian imagery and its farcical *détournement* makes his brand of Wagnerian satire in *Le Roi vierge* more comical than truly ironic. This perhaps helps explain Mendès's claim that Ludwig II would have approved of his fanciful portrayal: “Vous auriez souri de voir votre ressemblance mêlée aux mensonges des aventures (...) et de vous reconnaître enthousiaste et mélancolique, un peu fou, un peu féroce, mais fou à force de candeur, féroce à force de pureté ! Vous n'auriez même pas désapprouvé la mort que je vous donne, cette mort sur la croix de Jésus dans une comédie sacrée” (*Richard Wagner* 22). Conceivably, the main difference between Mendès and the next generation of Wagnerian novelists represented by Wyzewa and Dujardin is that he divorced himself from his fictional exploration of Wagnerian music in *Le Roi vierge*, preferring instead to choose a protagonist who was as distant from his real self as possible. It is intriguing to note that if Mendès's *héros célibataire* was a fictional creation with no basis in reality, he prefigured the mold of the sexually troubled Symbolist protagonist embraced by later fin-de-siècle writers who inserted autobiographical details into their narratives.

***Le Chapeau-chinois* and the subtleties of Wagnerian satire**

As a manner of conclusion, I would like to end this chapter with a brief discussion of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's short story "Le secret de l'ancienne musique" (1878) which is dedicated to Wagner and is part of the collection *Contes cruels* (1883). Originally conceived as a theatrical monologue destined for the fashionable actor Coquelin Cadet, this four-page-long tale makes transparent allusions to Wagner and his so-called "music of the future."⁷⁷ In the history of French literary Wagnerism, "Le secret" is noteworthy because it succeeds in conveying just how conflicted French artists felt over the absorption of Wagnerian aesthetics at a time of heightened nationalism. But that is not all it has to offer: as I would like to argue, "Le secret" can also be read as a master-class in the satire of Wagner by means of hyperbole. And this begins with the title itself, "ancient music" being the polar opposite of the "music of the future," suggesting that resisting Wagnerian aesthetics—or believing Wagnerian music might be unsuited for the French temperament—may well be a thing of the past.

The text begins with the current state of play at the Académie nationale de Musique, the erstwhile official name of the Paris Opéra during the second half of the Second Republic (1850-1852). Managerial complacency and artistic stasis have affected its orchestra which is now faced with the task of deciphering the score of "un certain compositeur allemand (dont le nom, désormais oublié, nous échappe heureusement !)" (*Œuvres complètes* I 638)⁷⁸ This type of amnesia is certainly wishful thinking on Villiers's part, as Wagner's name was already synonymous with

⁷⁷ For a detailed exploration of the concept of "music of the future," see Flora Willson's article's "Future History: Wagner, Offenbach, and 'la musique de l'avenir' in Paris, 1860," *Opera Quarterly* 30:4 (Autumn 2014): 287-314.

⁷⁸ In his short text for *La Revue wagnérienne* of May 1885 "La légende de Bayreuth," (based on the 1876 article "À propos des fêtes de Bayreuth"), Villiers similarly refused to name Wagner, preferring the tongue-in-cheek designation of "fou" or "fol." The story ends with the composer's benefactor being unable to remember his name: "les gens sérieux de là-bas [en Allemagne] ont dû renfermer, dès l'arrivée, son pauvre monomane qui souvent, l'avait amusé, après tout !—et dont il a oublié le nom" (104).

controversy in 1850s France, with his theoretical writings already being debated in the press before his music had been given much French exposure.⁷⁹ Moreover, as Gerald Turbow explains, Wagner was then linked to the realism of Courbet and was widely considered to be leading the charge against bourgeois art and the rules of good taste. (“Art and Politics, Wagnerism in France” 139) By the time “Le secret” was written, he had become even more infamous thanks to his anti-French wartime writings, chief among them *Eine Kapitulation*. Consequently, by refusing to name Wagner, Villiers seemingly marked a desire to turn his story away from a case study of contentious modernity in order to fashion it into a parable on the perils and delights of artistic innovation.

But the specter of nationalist rivalry is soon to rear its head and brings the would-be timeless tale back to historical time. Upon closer examination, the score of the unnamed German is deemed unplayable by the lead conductor of the Académie. Drawing a trite connection between the French national character and musical integrity, he refuses to make adaptations for fear of compromising the composer's vision: “la France ne saurait prendre sur elle de tronquer, par une exécution défectueuse, la pensée d'un compositeur... à quelque nation qu'il appartienne” (Idem). Knowing the history of Wagnerian performances in Paris in the late nineteenth century—where orchestral and choral excerpts helped familiarize the public with Wagner's music—, this type of righteousness is not just inaccurate, it is ironic, as Villiers's use of italics would indicate.

Being pressed to explain how exactly the music of a foreigner should be out of the reach of a first-rate orchestra, the conductor is forced to admit that one of the instruments required by the score is missing from his ensemble: “un instrument militaire aujourd’hui tombé en désuétude et qui n’a plus de représentant parmi nous; cet instrument, qui fit les délices de nos pères, avait

⁷⁹ Wagner's main opponents in the press, Fétis and Scudo, were keen to stress how Wagner was far from an innovator and relied on the legacy of Gluck. This is likely what Villiers is alluding to with his ironic characterization of Wagner as “le présomptueux novateur” and his reference to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* where Scudo published his indictment of Wagner's aesthetics in an article from August 15, 1852 (638).

nom jadis: *le Chapeau-chinois*” (Idem). Better known in the English-speaking world as a Turkish crescent, it is a percussion instrument made of a wooden pole and several bells and which is usually played in a military context. A quick examination of its history suggests Villiers was correct in confining the instrument to the past, as it was already known to Western Europeans in the sixteenth century. However, he did exaggerate its ancientness for comic effect when he wrote that “Les plus anciens [membres de l'auditoire] se souvenaient à peine de l'avoir entendu dans leur enfance” (639).⁸⁰ Although not common by any means, the *Chapeau-chinois* had in fact made regular appearances in French music, from Lully's famed Turkish march in his stage music for *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670) to Berlioz's *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale* (1840), which was premiered on the occasion of a state celebration of the July Revolution at the Bastille. The main constant in these examples is that the instrument denotes exoticism and militarism.

However, in German classical music, the Turkish crescent seems to be mostly confined to military bands.⁸¹ Villiers therefore took some creative license in imagining that Wagner had made use of it in his orchestra, the instrument's military background perhaps referring to the martial spirit commonly associated with Germany at the time. Incidentally, Wagner was familiar with Berlioz's *Grande symphonie* and had praised the music in his autobiography, *Mein Leben*. Yet for all of his admiration, Wagner perpetually felt alienated by the spirit of Berlioz's works which he qualified as *foreign*: “Es blieb mir eine Scheu wie vor etwas Fremden, mit welchem ich nie vollständig vertraut werden würde...” (*Mein Leben* 230). / “There remained in me a residue of reserve, as if toward a foreign element with which I could never become entirely familiar...” (*My Life* 192). In

⁸⁰ Especially so if the story is supposed to take place in the 1850s, as the reference to the Académie nationale de Musique indicates.

⁸¹ Haydn's “Turkish” opera, *L'incontro improvviso* (1775) does not call for a Turkish crescent in its instrumentation and neither does Mozart's *Singspiel Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), or Beethoven's Turkish march in *Die Ruinen von Athen* (1822).

spite of all the cultural exchanges and travels taking place in the late nineteenth century, music clearly had borders for both Wagner and Villiers, a fact underlined by the oddity of the *Chapeau-chinois*.

The rest of the story builds up the possibility for a *deus ex machina* to come save the day and help the national orchestra surmount the challenge posed by the German provocateur. Rumor has it that an old man, a hermit-like figure, may be capable of playing the exotic instrument. Modeled after the eccentric composer Ernest Cabaner (1833-1881) who was a regular fixture in Nina de Villard's salons, Villiers's musician character symbolizes artistic disinterestedness, a virtue that was highly valued by the Symbolists and an ideal towards which Villiers himself sacrificed financial security and physical comfort.⁸² Once located, the *Chapeau-chinois* player reveals himself to be a patriotic artist and accepts the task of performing at the Opéra out of duty, as if he were about to take part in a war: “Ah ! dit avec amertume le vieux maître, on se souvient de moi maintenant ? Je devrais... Mon pays avant tout. Messieurs, j'irai” (640). At this point, it seems likely that the old master will lead his fellow countrymen to victory thanks to his knowledge and experience. Like a translator of ancient languages, his secret weapon lies in his expertise in what is old and foreign, that is in making sense of an artifact such as the *Chapeau-chinois*. With his guidance, the arcane musical language of the German composer shall be deciphered and the public will be edified.

But it is not to be. Borrowing from the military setting in which the Turkish crescent habitually belongs, Villiers describes the evening of the premiere as a battlefield, with musicians awaiting the performance “l'arme au poing,” a possible echo to the 1861 *Tannhäuser*. (Idem) Once

⁸² Alan Raitt in the Pléiade edition of Villiers's complete works notes that Cabaner inspired many other writers, from Mendès himself in the *roman à clef* *La Maison de la vieille* (1894) to Léon Bloy in the short story “Le musicien du silence” (1893) and George Moore in *Memoirs of my Dead Life* (1906). See *Œuvres complètes* I (1298-1299).

again, there is a clear attempt at separating the historical context from the mythical resonance of the story—what Wagner called the “purely human”—with the old master carrying “l’instrument des temps passés, qui prenait, de la sorte, les proportions d’un symbole” as he makes his way to the orchestra. (Idem) This is so heavy-handed an explanation of authorial intent, in fact, as to point to satire. Surely we are about to witness an epic fall redolent of Wagner’s own fate at the Opéra.

As the *Chapeau-chinois* player begins to decipher his part, he gradually becomes aware of the extreme level of complexity posed by the score. Yet unlike most classical works, this has nothing to do with virtuosity, physical stamina, or unusual interpretative demands. On the contrary, it is about asking the musician to go so against the grain of his/her musical education that he/she will doubt whether they are still playing music, the composer asking for *silence* from an instrument renowned for its loud bell sounds.⁸³ The command is properly absurd and once more points to a supposed cultural incompatibility between France and Germany, as if Wagnerian music went against every fiber of a French person’s being:

Le maître allemand, par une jalousie tudesque, s’était complu, avec une âpreté germaine, une malignité rancunière, à hérissier la partie du Chapeau-chinois de difficultés presque insurmontables ! Elles s’y succédaient, pressées ! ingénieuses ! soudaines ! C’était un défi ! —Qu’on juge : cette partie ne se composait, exclusivement, que de *silences*. Or, même pour les personnes qui ne sont pas du métier, qu’y a-t-il de plus difficile à exécuter que le *silence* pour le Chapeau-chinois ?... Et c’était un CRESCENDO de silences que devait exécuter le vieil artiste ! (641)

In this short passage, we are presented with the two elements I mentioned above as Villiers’s significant contributions to French literary Wagnerism. First, there is a singular pleasure on his part in bringing up the cultural tug of war between France and Germany with at least three successive references to Wagner’s Germanness—allemand, tudesque, germaine— which he mischievously connects to maliciousness. Second comes the key word “défi” which was to

⁸³ Perhaps Villiers, a musician himself, was on to something: it would take another century for another composer—Philip Glass with his *4’33”* (1952)—to dare ask his audience to listen to mere silence.

reappear in Mallarmé's "Rêverie d'un poète français" (1885) where he memorably wrote: "Singulier défi qu'aux poètes dont il usurpe le devoir avec la plus candide et splendide bravoure, inflige Richard Wagner !" (*Œuvres complètes* II 154) Like an "open sesame," the "défi" encapsulates perhaps the most radical proposal of "Le secret." If, for Mallarmé, the challenge of describing the specific effects of Wagnerian theater on the poet led to one of the greatest poetic essays on music in the French literary canon, for Villiers it was simply too dangerous an endeavor. Rather than facing Wagner frontally, he implied he would prefer to remain silent. But contrary to the *Chapeau-chinois* player, this muteness is a conscious decision; to be precise, it is a strategy.

To dare to write about Wagner, or not to write about Wagner at all, that is indeed the quixotic question at the core of French literary Wagnerism and one with which Villiers wrestled perhaps more honestly than the other writers in this corpus. His friend Mallarmé's sonnet "Hommage" (1886) is a prime example of that dilemma, as it begins with an allusion to both silence and grief, "Le silence déjà funèbre d'une moire" (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 335). There is a sense of mourning in the entire first quatrain, the loss of a great "pillar" of the arts still reverberating across Europe three years after his passing. But there is also a concomitant feel of ambiguity: as Bertrand Marchal inquires, is the *hommage* truly an homage? Is it even sincere? What does the poem in fact say about Wagner? Should we read it in juxtaposition with the *Rêverie* in order to decipher its meaning? (*Lecture de Mallarmé* 213-4)

Despite writing in prose, Villiers seems to pose similar questions in "Le secret" and leaves them just as open-ended as Mallarmé. Is the *Chapeau-chinois* musician performing at all if he is "playing silence"? Is his fall a noble sign of exertion, or a grotesque suicide? Should we read this enigmatic ending in light of Villiers's correspondence with Marras, where he spoke of the "inexpressible" experience of listening to Wagner play his own music at the piano? What I would

like to suggest here is that Villiers's refusal to provide easy answers is, in itself, satirical because it is the exact opposite of Wagner's artistic methods. If Wagner theorized at length on his art and wrote music dramas that are still infamous for their length, Villiers and Mallarmé chose concision in their responses to Wagner and cast doubt as to their true feelings in their creative writings on the composer.

One incident involving the reception of “Le secret” confirms Villiers's desire to obfuscate his opinion on Wagner and, by extension, tread the delicate line of parody and plaudit in his Wagnerian fiction. Once Coquelin Cadet got possession of the manuscript, he made edits that suited him, changing the title to the more comical “Le Chapeau-chinois” and requesting the names of the unnamed Opéra administrator and lead conductor in the story from Villiers, doubtless so he could impersonate them and amuse his audience.⁸⁴ The irate writer wrote back to his publisher Mme Tresse—with full knowledge that she was to convey the information back to Coquelin Cadet—and defended the integrity of his artistic vision:

Je vous dirais que, travaillant depuis vingt-deux ans pour l'exclusif amour de cette absurdité qu'on appelle l'Art littéraire, il ne me convient pas, d'abord, qu'on se permette de demander des conseils à des gens de métier pour contrôler ou modifier ce que j'écris,—même quand il me plaît d'écrire des babioles (...) *Le Secret de l'ancienne-Musique* ne doit pas être et n'a jamais été dans ma pensée une *simple* farce (...) la fin n'en étant nullement amusante... (*Œuvres complètes* I 1293-4)

No simple farce: in other words, “Le secret” is an adequate representation of French literary Wagnerism's subtle parodies of “Le Dieu Richard Wagner” (to reprise Mallarmé's equivocal expression from his “Hommage”). But if Mallarmé, Wyzewa and Dujardin's correspondence testifies to the fact that they all struggled to do justice to their personal reactions to Wagnerian

⁸⁴ Coquelin Cadet may have taken Villiers's text to be set in the year it was written and not twenty years prior. This chronological confusion is perhaps also a factor in his having mistaken the story for a “farce,” as his request suggests he would have poked fun at the current administrator and lead conductor of the Opéra. For more details, see *Œuvres complètes* I (1293).

music, only Villiers designated the fruit of his labor on Wagner as a “babiole.” Was he being modest? Is it not rather more likely that he was touching on the tentativeness inherent to writing about Wagner?

Contrary to Mendès, Villiers refused to capitalize on his Tribschen sojourn and never wrote a proper account of his Wagnerian experiences at a time where he was sure to garner some interest from avant-garde writers: no memoirs, no travel article series, no treatises. Even his review of *Das Rheingold* from 1869 said very little about the powers of Wagnerian music, focusing instead on detailing the plot before ending on a confession of critical defeat: “Il faut renoncer à l'analyse de cette œuvre incomparable (...) Il faut entendre et voir ; on n'exprime pas l'idée d'un tel chef-d'œuvre” (*L'Universel* September 21, 1869). Once again, the notion of the “inexpressible” comes back, as if Villiers were repeatedly circling around the philosophical problem posed by Vladimir Jankélévitch a century later: “La musique témoigne du fait que l'essentiel en toutes choses est je-ne-sais-quoi d'insaisissable et d'ineffable ; elle renforce en nous la conviction que voici : la chose la plus importante du monde est justement celle qu'on ne peut dire” (*Quelque part dans l'inachevé* 247). In this light, the dearth of Wagnerian texts in Villiers's literary output can be explained by his awareness that he had come near something that was not just conceptually slippery but absolute. As a matter of fact, only a couple of short stories, “Le secret de l'ancienne musique” as well as the 1876 “À propos des fêtes de Bayreuth” (reworked as “La légende de Bayreuth” and published in the *Revue wagnérienne* of May 1885) tackled the subject of Wagnerian art upfront. Yet, in both instances, Wagner's name is silenced and the overall tone—if one of admiration—is darkly comical, muddying the waters of genius by bringing it all too close to insanity. In sum, both stories refuse to deliver a verdict on the merits of Wagnerian art, letting the reader draw a conclusion for her/himself.

Typography in these two stories is an essential vehicle for that ambiguity. In “Le secret,” italics convey clichés—such as the conductor’s self-righteousness—as well as objective impossibilities, as with the old master’s silent performance that seems magical because it transcends the laws of sound: “il semblait, par moments, *qu’on l’entendait* !” (641) Yet this state of grace cannot outlast the concert and the musician ruins the illusion with an unfortunate monologue that parodies Wagner’s detractors: “Messieurs, vociféra le digne professeur, j’y renonce ! Je n’y comprends rien. On n’écrit pas une ouverture pour un solo ! Je ne puis pas jouer ! C’est trop difficile. Je proteste au nom de M. Clapisson ! Il n’y a pas de mélodie là-dedans. C’est du charivari ! L’Art est perdu ! Nous tombons dans le vide !” (Idem)⁸⁵ As it happens, the *Chapeau-chinois* virtuoso’s greatest mistake is to confuse his individual viewpoint—tainted as it is by his prior exposure to critical takes on Wagner—with a collective state of affairs. In his detestation for a score that demanded he throw years of practice out of the window, he falsely prophesizes not just his country’s but the whole world’s artistic ruin. The extravagance of his prediction is precisely what precipitates him into the pit “emporta[nt], en s’engouffrant ainsi dans les flancs profonds du monstre, le secret des charmes de l’ancienne-Musique” (Idem). If Mallarmé thought of Wagnerian opera as a paradoxical “Monstre, Qui ne peut Être !”—an impossible amalgamation of live performance and extreme authorial control—the monster of Villiers’s story is not the music itself, or even Wagner, but the a prioris that threaten to contaminate the experience. Similar to the clamor that overpowered the performance of *Tannhäuser* at the Opéra de Paris in 1861, these preconceptions—be they positive or negative—prevent the listener from truly hearing what is

⁸⁵ This excerpt contains several parodic references to anti-Wagnerian rhetoric. For one, the notion that Wagnerian music did not contain any melodies was a key point of contention for the critic and music theorist François-Joseph Fétis. According to Flora Willson, his line of argument was the following: “Melody was thought particularly endangered, if not wholly banished from his [Wagner’s] works; harmony was extended and forced almost beyond recognition” (“Future History: Wagner, Offenbach and ‘la musique de l’avenir’ in Paris, 1860,” *Opera Quarterly* 30:4: 287-314. Second, “charivari” is a blatant allusion to the satirical newspaper of the same name that published Wagner cartoons, most of which drawn by Cham.

going on. In this light, the italics of “il semblait *qu'on l'entendait*” signal a projection, suggesting the virtuoso's role as the rescuer of French national honor may have influenced the audience who, in turn, hears something that is simply not there.

In “La légende de Bayreuth,” capital letters also provide ironic reinforcement, underlining the hubris of a composer who prophesizes he shall turn monarchs into vassals by forcing them to absorb “MA MUSIQUE” at regular intervals in his own theater where they will be forced to sit in one-hundred-degree heat for thirteen hours, presumably to watch the *Ring* cycle in one take. Obviously, this is a highly exaggerated version of a situation rooted in some amount of truth, where Villiers's personal opinion on the Bayreuth Festival remains mysterious. Although he did not go to the opening in 1876, he surely heard enthusiastic reports from Mendès or Dujardin and was thus able to accurately convey the punitive atmosphere of the Wagnerian temple. Indeed, the recently inaugurated Bayreuth Festspielhaus had no bathrooms and was extremely stuffy. Yet it was attended by the likes of Wilhelm I and Ludwig II, who sat in the *Fürstenloge*. As Beate Wyss explains: “Wagner's dictatorial art cancels the public as a corporeal fact. (...) The public exists exclusively for the work of art, and in the auditorium, as a corpus it is literally extinguished. Here, it is pitch black so that the stage light can shine all the more brightly” (“*Ragnarök* of Illusion: Richard Wagner's Mystical Abyss at Bayreuth”). As ludicrous as the master plan of the composer in “La légende” may look and however heavy-handed Villiers's satirical portrayal of Wagner's grand project might be, the fact is that Wagner won a decisive victory in 1876, a feat that forced the respect of aesthetes of all stripes. In this case, Wagner's creative madness paid off and the Festival has since enshrined his legacy.

As Mallarmé wrote on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, this embrace of folly was also a key feature in Villiers's works and distinguished him from the other poets of his era, many of whom saw him

as an isolated genius, or as Wyzewa proposed, a “prince” ill-equipped for the base realities of this world.⁸⁶ In short, he was a worthy fin-de-siècle idol and one capable of proposing an alternative to realism with his embrace of dreams of aristocratic grandeur:

Je ne sais pas, mais je crois, en réveillant ces souvenirs de primes années, que vraiment l'arrivée fut extraordinaire, ou que nous étions bien fous ! les deux peut-être et me plais à l'affirmer. Il [Villiers] agissait aussi des drapeaux de victoire très anciens, ou futurs, ceux-là mêmes qui laissent de l'oubli des piliers choir leur flamme amortie brûlant encore : je jure que nous les vîmes. (*Œuvres complètes* II 31)

Much like the Wagner he depicted in his letters, Villiers appeared almost divinely inspired to his contemporaries, a reputation that had perhaps just as much to do with his theatrical nature and extravagant demeanor as his unclassifiable writings. As Alan Raitt notes, the greatest paradox in Villiers's Wagnerism was not to have written insightful essays nor to have birthed evocative poems: “Il ne devint jamais le vulgarisateur de l'œuvre de Wagner que son amitié avec le compositeur et son profond amour de sa musique lui auraient permis d'être s'il l'avait voulu” (*Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* 121). Not even his short stories, for all of their clever deflection, helped him elucidate the question of why Wagner had made such a profound impression on himself and his friends back in Tribschen that his poetic abilities had been momentarily neutralized (“La journée d'hier a été INEXPRIMABLE” (*Correspondance générale de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* I 134)). Instead, Villiers revealed himself to be a passionate if unorthodox pianist capable of single-handedly making the dramatic situations imagined by Wagner come to life, his playing conveying a sincere homage to the composer whom he freely reinterpreted at will. If Mendès did demonstrate the need to reappropriate Wagner in *Le Roi vierge*—and highlighted the nefarious consequences of interpreting Wagner's music to the letter—

⁸⁶ See “Le comte de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam Notes,” *La Revue indépendante* (December 1886): 260.

Villiers reappropriated him not with his words but by means of performance, which impressed his contemporaries and, on occasion, may have ignited the Wagnerian fire in them.

Chapter 2

That Obscure Object of Desire: Édouard Dujardin's Wagner

“C’est une chose douce
qu’être tranquille dans son illusion”
(Dujardin, *Les Hantises* 197).

If the 1861 *Tannhäuser* debacle at the Paris Opéra was due partly to the public's disdain against the Emperor's protection of Wagner and partly to critics taking issue with the composer's iconoclastic aesthetic discourse, by 1870, the Franco-Prussian War cemented the case for French animosity towards Wagner. Subsequent to the 1869 French translation of Wagner's anti-Semitic pamphlet *Das Judenthum in der Musik* and the 1871 publication of the anti-French vaudeville *Eine Kapitulation*, Wagner's chances of seeing his works performed in full in the French capital became close to none.¹ The unofficial Parisian ban was lifted only twenty years later, in 1887, when *Lohengrin* finally earned its premiere at the Eden-Théâtre, but production shut down after a single performance due to riots.² It took until 1891 for *Lohengrin* to be premiered at the Opéra.

Throughout these three decades, if a young artist felt the inclination to learn more about the man whom Baudelaire had deemed to be “le représentant le plus vrai de la nature moderne,” he/she had to be on the lookout for the right opportunity. (*Oeuvres complètes* II 806) The golden ticket could just be an invitation to a musical *soirée* where one of the more capable guests might undertake the performance of a piano reduction of one of Wagner's preludes or other instrumental extracts like the popular wedding march from *Lohengrin*. Otherwise, orchestral excerpts could

¹ To the exception of Wagner's own *grand opéra*, *Rienzi*, performed at the Théâtre Lyrique in 1869. For more information, see Mark Everist's article “Wagner and Paris: the Case of *Rienzi* (1869)” in *19th-Century Music*. 41:1 (Summer 2017): 3-30.

² For more on the hostile political context against Germany and the impact of Boulangisme on the riots, see Kelly Jo Maynard's PhD dissertation *The Enemy Within: Encountering Wagner in Early Third-Republic France*, 45-61. Katharine Ellis replaces the ill-fated Eden-Théâtre production within a wider regional context, where well-received performances of *Lohengrin* outside of Paris in 1891 did much to convince the Opéra to program the opera in September. See “How to Make Wagner Normal. *Lohengrin*'s ‘tour de France’ of 1891-2,” *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 25:2 (July 2013): 122-123.

occasionally be heard during concerts such as Jules Pasdeloup's Concerts Populaires in the 1870s at the Cirque d'Hiver, which slowly evolved into performances of entire acts from *Lohengrin* (Act I in 1882) and *Tristan und Isolde* (Act I in 1884 and Act II in 1885) at the Château-d'Eau theater in the early 1880s, under the baton of Charles Lamoureux.³ At any rate, the French capital could only grant intrigued listeners so much fragmentary knowledge and going abroad was in fact the only means to hear Wagnerian music under the conditions intended by the composer.⁴

A pivotal moment in the progressive acceptance of Wagner in France came in the year 1882. The forthcoming summer premiere of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth was shaping up to be one of the biggest cultural events of the year and was sure to create ripples on a pan-European level. Long-term Wagner devotees and artistic progressives alike made sure to devise travel plans while forward-thinking music critics delegated correspondents to the Festspielhaus. One such journal was the up-and-coming weekly, *La Renaissance musicale*, headed by the established Berlioz specialist Edmond Hippeau. Although he had already recruited renowned Wagnerites, such as Édouard Schuré and Victor Wilder, as occasional contributors, Hippeau was not opposed to hiring new talent. Little did he know that his newest recruit, a twenty-two-year-old student in composition from the Paris Conservatoire named Édouard Dujardin, would go on to become Wagner's most ardent champion in fin-de-siècle France.⁵

³ For a rather unflattering description of the atmosphere of the Cirque d'hiver, see chapter XV from *À rebours* in which des Esseintes muses on the sacrilegious nature of playing excerpts from works that are so emphatically presented by their creator as a totality: "Il n'avait pas eu le courage de se plonger dans ce bain de multitude (...) et il savait pertinemment aussi qu'il n'était pas une scène, pas même une phrase d'un opéra du prodigieux Wagner qui pût être impunément détachée de son ensemble. Les morceaux, découpés et servis sur le plat d'un concert, perdaient toute signification, demeuraient privés de sens..." (327).

⁴ Traveling to Bayreuth was often characterized as a "pilgrimage" by Wagnerites. By the 1890s, it became a more widespread trend among the cultivated bourgeoisie, to which the success of Albert Lavignac's 1897 book, *Un voyage artistique à Bayreuth* would attest.

⁵ In the autobiographical section of the article "Considérations sur l'art wagnérien," which was published during the last months of the *Revue* and aimed to sum up Dujardin's trajectory as an artist and editor, there is a mention of his early work for the *Renaissance musicale*: "Et la victoire fut que je m'étais fait critique musical; la *Renaissance musicale* avait accueilli mon innocence avide de bien devenir, et hebdomadairement je jugeais des concerts où j'avais toujours assisté," *Revue wagnérienne* 3 (July-August 1887): 175.

In May 1882, the young reviewer got his big break: an assignment to cover the London premiere of the *Ring* cycle in full alongside Hippeau. Part of a tour orchestrated by the impresario Angelo Neumann in order to spread the Wagnerian gospel across Europe, these performances had already been met with success in Bayreuth. Moreover, they reportedly bore Wagner and Ludwig II's stamp of approval with the advertising promising "gorgeous scenery, magnificent costumes, armours etc. which have been so much admired at the Bayreuth Festival-plays."⁶ Needless to say, the London event was to be great preparation for a neophyte like Dujardin in anticipation of his summer trip to Bayreuth, his next assignment as a musical correspondent.

What ensued was a classic case of love at first hearing. It is both reminiscent of the experience of Dujardin's great predecessors—chief among them being Baudelaire who was so transfixed by what he had witnessed at the Salle Ventadour in 1860 that he felt unable to determine how he had been "vanquished" by Wagnerian music—but also unique due to the extent of the author's musical knowledge, which distinguishes him from his peers.⁷ For all of his technical skills, however, the young critic kept mum on his personal feelings in his review dated May 14, 1882: "Nous n'avons pas ici à analyser et à apprécier l'œuvre colossale que nous avons été entendre: nous dirons seulement quelques mots de l'interprétation et de l'impression produite" (*La Renaissance musicale* 2 155). Such reticence is telling, hinting at the baffling nature of such an alien object as the complete *Ring* cycle to someone who grew up listening to French operetta, the

⁶ This is a direct quotation from a promotional poster. <https://ilab.org/articles/collecting-rare-books-and-first-editions-ring-comes-london> Last accessed February 16, 2020.

⁷ Let us note here that none of the poets who engaged with Wagner (Nerval, Baudelaire, Mallarmé) possessed any notion of music theory nor did they practice an instrument. Neither did the Symbolists who contributed to the *Revue wagnérienne* with the notable exception of Dujardin. His training entailed learning to play the violin in his teenage years and attending the Paris Conservatoire in his early twenties for composition classes where he had Paul Dukas and Claude Debussy as colleagues. The only remaining musical composition from Dujardin is the song cycle, *Litanies* (1888), for which he also wrote the lyrics, in a seemingly Wagnerian fashion. The realization, however, was mediocre and the cycle has not been professionally recorded. For more information, see Steven Huebner's thorough overview of the songs in "Édouard Dujardin, Wagner, and the Origins of Stream of Consciousness Writing," *19th-Century Music* 37:1 (Summer 2013): 71-77.

German instrumental classics and works by Ambroise Thomas, Camille Saint-Saëns or Léo Delibes.

Beyond the difficulty posed by the formal novelty of the *Ring* for the uninitiated, it is also conceivable that the young Dujardin was so shaken by his emotional response to Wagnerian music that it took him decades to unpack his own reaction in the poetic manner that he probably sensed the work deserved. As it happens, Dujardin only clarified the extent of his true feelings as a first-time Wagner spectator in the 1930s, in *Mallarmé par un des siens*, a memoir outlining Symbolism's contributions to literary history:

Si on laisse au mot “comprendre” sa signification courante, je puis dire que j’assistai, sans comprendre, à l’énorme déroulement de ces quatre soirées. Mais l’œuvre répondait évidemment aux plus profonds besoins de mon inconscient ; ce furent quatre soirées d’extase ; j’étais pris comme dans le flux d’un océan ; et je suis resté pris toute ma vie. (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 196)

It is tempting to see this delayed account as highly eroticized, in the same vein as Baudelaire's reception of Wagner.⁸ This excerpt is almost just as sensual in nature, seemingly including all the necessary steps needed for sexual satisfaction, from the ignition of desire—framed as a physical response to the emotional call of the music—to orgasmic fluids (“extase,” “pris,” “flux”). Here the revelation appears to have been not just an aesthetic one, but also highly personal in nature, with the young man finding his hitherto ignored subconscious appetites suddenly and overwhelmingly satisfied. The ensuing result is a form of bliss so strong that it hits him like a gigantic wave, “j’étais pris comme dans le flux d’un océan,” leaving him shaking in delight.⁹ Moreover, the ambiguity of

⁸ For more on Baudelaire's highly erotic take on Wagnerian music, see Laurence Dreyfus's *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (17-21).

⁹ As shown in *Oper und Drama*, aquatic imagery is clearly gendered as female and compared with music—also specifically marked as female—for its fluidity and depth (III: 4). In addition, the sexual connotations lurking behind the oceanic metaphor are not exclusive to Dujardin, but are already present in Wagner, with for instance, Brünnhilde equating her virginity with a quiet stream in the final act of *Siegfried*. For an analysis of this scene and its gender components, see Grey's *Wagner's Musical Prose* (161-3). The metaphor was picked up by critics, such as Auguste de Gasperini who preceded Dujardin in conflating Wagnerian music's wave-like emotional power and sexual pleasure: “on se perd avec délices dans cet océan de sensations inconnues ; on éprouve une secrète jouissance à ces dangers, à

the aquatic imagery opens up space for a psychoanalytic interpretation: the ocean's might is in fact benevolent and reminiscent of a sense of maternal security. What may have appeared to be an overwhelming torrent turns out to be amniotic liquid. Both carnal and maternal longings are satiated all at once; the listener experiences the impossible within the designated emotional realm outlined by the music.¹⁰

In a situation reminiscent of the second act of *Parsifal* in which the temptress Kundry attempts to lure the eponymous hero to her bed by posing as his dead mother, Herzeleide, Wagnerian music can be seen as a vehicle that got Dujardin hooked by making him feel like a whole subject at home within itself. The whole process is redolent of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's concept of anamnesis in his examination of Baudelaire and Wagner's relationship:

C'est d'ailleurs bien la raison pour laquelle ce qui est demandé et cherché dans le procès de l'anamnèse ou le recours à la réminiscence, c'est le sujet lui-même. L'anamnèse est ici un procès de réappropriation subjective. On doit même dire, plus rigoureusement, que ce qui est demandé, c'est en fait, l'*origine* du sujet... (*Musica Ficta* 61-62)

By relying on musical strategies that conveyed an unmistakable impression of heady eroticism to the listeners, such as the delaying of harmonic resolution for as long as possible and the use of adventurous chromaticism, Wagnerian music seems to unveil our innermost nature as *desiring* subjects, whether the audience chooses to acknowledge that reality or not.¹¹ If we feel like it is

ces écueils..." (*La Nouvelle Allemagne Musicale : Richard Wagner* 165). For a more thorough analysis of Gasperini's writings on Wagner, consult Katharine Ellis's "Wagnerism and Anti-Wagnerism in the Paris Periodical Press, 1852-1870," *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme* (63-8).

¹⁰ This passage from Bryan Magee's *The Tristan Chord* concerning Wagner's "special appeal" very much resonates with Dujardin's experience: "By successfully giving expression to a universal, highly erotic longing for the unattainable he provides it with a certain degree of satisfaction. Not just in the world of our imagination but in the world of oceanic, unbounded feeling that music makes it possible for us to inhabit we are enabled to confound the reality principle, experience the disallowed, live the impossible. It is as if our most heartfelt but also most hopeless yearnings were, contrary to all possibility, met. A wholeness that is unachievable in life is achieved nevertheless..." (27).

¹¹ For more information on Wagner's "erotic harmonies" and use of musical strategies for sensual purposes, see Dreyfus's third chapter, "Harmonies", in *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (73-116). Additionally, Lawrence Kramer's chapter, "Musical Form and Fin-De-Siècle Sexuality" lists typically Wagnerian methods such as: "melodic motion by semitones, ambiguous or indefinite harmonies, a texture dense with appoggiaturas, many of which "resolve" to unstable referential sonorities" (*Music As Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* 147).

seductive, it is because—as Kundry knows—it brings our most secret urges to life regardless of whether or not they are realistic. Parsifal can be reunited with Herzeleide during Kundry’s monologue and we, the listeners, are able to see ourselves experience a higher form of love than anything that may ever be available to us in the real world.

Like Baudelaire before him, Dujardin confessed his admiration to Wagner in a personal letter sent to the composer, the copy of which has been lost. However, the response to the letter was published with great fracas in *La Renaissance musicale* of May 21, 1882 and dealt with the question of whether or not any of Wagner's dramatic works would ever see the light of day in France.¹² The reply was brutal and denied any future possibilities, Wagner being convinced of his works' essential German nature, which would condemn them to be misunderstood by the French public. Nevertheless, the fact that such an obscure twenty-two-year-old critic as Dujardin was able to secure a definitive answer from a celebrity was a real *coup d'éclat* and helped forge him an early reputation as a prominent Wagnerite. All he had to do was to consolidate his status as a Wagnerian through the study of Wagner’s theoretical works, most of which remained untranslated and required a solid command of the German language.

Where Dujardin’s case differentiates itself from other admirers, however, is that the development of his interest in Wagnerian matters occurred at the same time he began his literary career. Under this light, the 1882 review represents not just a felicitous text in its author's career, but rather an indication of his artistic future: “Pour nous, qui n’avons pas assisté aux fêtes de Bayreuth, l’Anneau du Nibelung nous a fait une impression que nous n’oublierons jamais” (*La Renaissance musicale* 2 155). In light of later evidence, this was a prediction of sorts and one

¹² The letter was transcribed by Dujardin and published in *La Renaissance musicale* of May 21, 1882 (165). One week later, Edmond Hippeau spelled out the official position of his publication in the face of the controversy caused by Wagner’s letter and distanced himself from some of the composer’s assertions (169-170). The letter also prompted another opinion piece from the composer Ernest Reyer in the June 4, 1882 issue (177-178).

foreshadowing the constant presence of Wagner as a privileged interlocutor in Dujardin's work. More importantly, it also suggests that Dujardin seems to have made a connection between his own impetus to write creatively and Wagner as early as 1882, a fact that will be of great importance during the years of the *Revue wagnérienne*, 1885 to 1888.

I have found my intuition of a lifelong relationship of influence between Dujardin and Wagner confirmed in the archive, where I found an unpublished essay from 1947 meant to vindicate Wagner against Nietzsche's unequivocal condemnation of the composer in *The Case of Wagner*: "l'œuvre de Wagner aura répondu à ceux [les besoins spirituels] de ma vie tout entière, je puis le dire au moment où je viens d'atteindre ma quatre-vingt-sixième année" (*Le Cas Frederick Nietzsche* 2).¹³ Moreover, the same text conveniently highlights Dujardin's outstanding constancy as a long-term Wagnerian devotee immune to changes in fashion: "rien ne put jamais effleurer" nor "entamer mon culte pour Wagner" (Idem). Although Dujardin had periods in which he engaged with Wagner more readily than others, there is no reason to doubt that his emotional and intellectual attachment to Wagner was indeed an enduring affair, as *Le Cas Frederick Nietzsche* would tend to prove.

My focus in this chapter will be a near-decade of intense productivity, from 1885 to about 1893, which encompasses most of Dujardin's career as a creative writer before his transformation into a scholar of religion. By turns a poet, short-story writer, novelist, amateur composer and controversial playwright, he exhibited a versatility nearly unmatched by his contemporaries. Some

¹³ This manuscript is kept at the Harry Ransom Center, which is located at the University of Texas campus in Austin. Box 1. Folder 9-11. All subsequent references to Dujardin's personal papers kept in Texas will be made under the abbreviation HRC.

The incendiary nature of the text may be responsible for its unpublished status. Indeed, in the essay, Dujardin goes as far as to cast Nietzsche as a blind man—with homosexual tendencies—who suffered ill-health due to compulsive masturbatory habits: "C'est que Nietzsche, comme d'ailleurs plusieurs autres malheureux grands hommes, tel Paracelse, tel Kant, était un onaniste (...) Le cas de l'onanisme n'est pas sans rapports avec celui de l'inverti" (9-11). Dujardin was thus ventriloquizing Wagner's side of the argument that led to his falling-out with Nietzsche in 1877, a view that held little currency in 1947 since Nietzsche had by then become a canonized philosopher.

may argue that such artistic dispersion may amount to being a “jack of all trades, master of none”; the sure sign of high ambitions betrayed by mediocrity of execution.¹⁴ Yet the story he told later in life was one that gently asked the reader to reconsider him as an imperfect but forward-thinking artist who meant to revivify literature by means of intense experimentation. His posthumous reputation as a minor novelist who happened to be the inventor of the interior monologue does not belie that narrative. In fact, it owes a lot to James Joyce’s advocacy of *Les Lauriers sont coupés* as a proto-modernist work worthy of critical attention, if only because it allegedly inspired the unusual form with which he transcribed Molly Bloom’s inner dialogue in the closing chapter of *Ulysses*.¹⁵

My point is certainly not to proclaim Dujardin as a neglected literary genius, nor do I quite see *Les Lauriers sont coupés* as an “accomplished post-Wagnerian work of art,” to quote Anthony Suter, its most recent translator into English (XLIII). To be precise, I propose to consider Dujardin as a competent writer blessed with extraordinary instincts, which were a truthful reflection of his time. That is the lens through which I see his thorough engagement with the musical question because it is a representative example of the Symbolist ethos, which envisaged music—specifically Wagnerian music due to its unprecedented totalizing ambition—as a great rival to be surpassed poetically.

¹⁴ Interestingly enough, the accusation of being a dilettante was one applied to Wagner by the likes of Nietzsche and Thomas Mann, with the latter boldly claiming: “daß Wagners Kunst ein mit höchster Willenskraft und Intelligenz monumentalisierten und ins Geniehafte getriebenen Dilettantismus ist” (*Wagner und unsere Zeit* 75). / “Wagner’s art is a case of dilettantism that has been monumentalized by a supreme effort of the will and intelligence—dilettantism raised to the level of genius” (*Pro and Contra Wagner* 103).

¹⁵ According to Valéry Larbaud, Joyce designated *Les Lauriers* as his formal inspiration for his use of the interior monologue in *Ulysses*: “Dans *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, me dit Joyce, le lecteur se trouve installé, dès les premières lignes dans la pensée du personnage principal, et c’est le déroulement ininterrompu de cette pensée qui se substituant complètement à la forme usuelle du récit, nous apprend ce que fait ce personnage et ce qui lui arrive... ‘Du reste, ajouta-t-il, lisez *Les Lauriers sont coupés*’” (“Préface” in the 1924 edition of *Les Lauriers sont coupés* 9).

Like other French poets before him, Dujardin had to take the time to craft his poetic reaction to Wagnerian music drama, a reaction that happened to be concomitant with his emergence as a Symbolist writer in the late 1880s. First, he had to engage critically with Wagner and penned a number of articles and translations, most of which appeared in the *Revue wagnérienne*. Secondly, he began extracting qualities he perceived as enviable in Wagner and Wagnerian music drama—emotional transparency, multifaceted portrayals of interiority, the free-floating musicality of the Wagnerian *Stabreim*, the blending of various art forms into a singular artistic object, to name a few—in order to adapt them into his own literary creations. It is through this fragmentation and reappropriation of key Wagnerian aesthetic principles, I argue, that his poems and novels succeeded in not being pale copies of the original. Indeed, none of the works examined here are fully Wagnerian in their themes, which was, conversely, the preferred route of Wagnerite musicians, like Vincent d'Indy and his *Fervaal* (1897), an opera usually referred to as “Parsifal français.” Nor are they quite a pastiche, unlike what Laforgue—a personal friend of Dujardin's—produced with “Lohengrin, fils de Parsifal,” a comical short story from the collection *Moralités légendaires* (1885).¹⁶ Rather, what I suspect Dujardin meant to accomplish with his creative writing was to preserve an elusive “Wagnerian essence” in a fully autonomous work.

The biggest point of confluence between Wagner and Dujardin, I contend, is an idealization of emotional disclosure, one aiming for the revelation of the totality of the protagonists' inner life and the perfect transparency of their motives and feelings. Here it is important to underline that Wagner's unprecedentedly complex portrayal of character psychology on the stage—one that

¹⁶ In *Les premiers poètes du vers libre* (1922), Dujardin gives a few details on his relationship with Laforgue whom he got to meet during a brief Berlin sojourn in 1886 with Wyzewa and Chamberlain. If both poets felt a sense of kinship, it was likely due to a shared interest in Schopenhauerian thought. However, their sources in the matter differed. While Dujardin's interest was piqued through his work on Wagner, Laforgue got to learning about Schopenhauer with Hartmann's *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (1869).

conveys the illusion of relief through the combined usage of word and music—resonated with a broader fin-de-siècle turning inward caused by a redefinition of the workings of subjectivity predating phenomenology by a decade or so.¹⁷

It seems as if Dujardin did anticipate a specific interpretation of Wagner's oeuvre that stressed its repeated attempts to portray interiority more accurately than ever before, a theory popularized a century or so later by the musicologist Carl Dahlhaus in the 1970s. In the article "Die Bedeutung des Gestischen in Wagners Musikdramen" (1969), Dahlhaus exposed an unusual thesis: Wagner's works, he claimed, were subjected to a unique evolution from outer (read: conventional) to inner drama, with a shift occurring in 1870 with the publication of the *Beethoven* essay, the product of Wagner's prolonged engagement with Schopenhauer's philosophy, which allegedly prompted a newfound focus on his characters' psychological drama.¹⁸

Notwithstanding Dahlhaus's conjecture, Wagner's evolution as an increasingly daring dramatist has also been explained in light of his shifting political views, which went from an ardent embrace of revolutionary left-wing politics, as illustrated by his participation in the May 1849 Dresden uprising, to a sense of apathy combined with raging anti-Semitism later in life, as Bryan Magee has argued: "His whole attitude to life took a metaphysical turn and became more inward than outward looking" (77). According to this other convenient narrative, Wagner's political

¹⁷ Fin-de-siècle literature's obsession with the scrupulous detailing of interiority was an obvious reaction against Naturalism's scientific pretensions in its exhaustive fictional representations of French society. By contrast, the Symbolists and Decadents believed that their field of investigation ought to be much smaller and limit itself to the exploration of the self, which is always synonymous with individuality and thereby counters the notion of heredity and the socio-economic pressures put forward by the Naturalists. What they discovered through their work of self-analysis was that consciousness is in fact divided beyond what had already been delineated by Cartesian mind-body dualism, or according to Valérie Michelet-Jacquod: "La découverte de la conscience divisée révèle le mode de fonctionnement double de l'intelligence, qui ne peut à la fois coïncider avec l'objet qu'elle veut saisir et le juger" (*Le Roman symboliste* 104).

¹⁸ Upon examining the evidence more closely, this "progression towards greater inwardness" narrative does not seem to hold water and resembles a myth. Indeed, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1867), a work in which the people plays such a vital role, seems to sit uncomfortably after the chamber drama of *Tristan und Isolde* (1859). As for the last chapter of the *Ring* cycle, *Götterdämmerung* (1876), it is perhaps the most traditional of Wagner's late operas in its structure with numerous choruses, ensembles and interludes but few monologues.

disillusionment went hand in hand with a rejection of operatic conventions, all the way towards *Parsifal*, a work he classified not as an opera, nor even a music drama—Wagner’s preferred term for his works in the wake of the publication of *Oper und Drama* (1851)—but rather as a *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, literally a consecrated stage feast, revolving around the spiritual enlightenment of its protagonist.¹⁹ Dujardin’s own political evolution, intriguingly, echoes Wagner’s, from his valiant Wagnerism at a time when street riots against Wagner and Germany were rife, via his journalistic manifestations of pacifism and tacit support of Germany during World War I, all the way towards his reactionary turn in the 1940s, where he made a show of support towards the Nazi regime during World War II.²⁰

After many years during which scholars were either circumspect about or flatly denied the impact of Dujardin’s activity as a Wagnerian music critic on his literary works, recent critical literature has aimed to explore the extent of this case of influence.²¹ As it happens, only few French literature specialists have dared tackle the issue, perhaps due to a general uneasiness concerning word-and-music matters, which meant that the initiative was left to other disciplines. A pioneering work in examining Dujardin’s relationship to Wagner came from his most recent translator, Anthony Suter, in the preface to his English translation of *Les Lauriers*, *The Bays are Sere* (1991),

¹⁹ *Parsifal*’s unusual focus on interiority has been emphasized by the director Hans-Jürgen Syberberg whose 1982 film, *Parsifal*, is set within the narrow confines of Wagner’s death mask, turning the work into what Alain Badiou has called a “cranial drama, so to speak” (*Five Lessons on Wagner* 112).

²⁰ In 1943, Dujardin visited the Bayreuth festival and exchanged a few letters with Winifred Wagner, a personal friend of Hitler’s, whom he met both in Paris and in Bayreuth (Folder 90.6 HRC). This was also the year during which he published *Rencontres avec Houston Stewart Chamberlain*, a collection of memories centering on his friendship with the proto-Nazi philosopher. The final pages see Dujardin quote a passage from *Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* in which Chamberlain calls on the upcoming arrival of a “pure-raced leader” and finishes on a positive allusion to Hitler.

²¹ For examples of skepticism on the impact of Wagnerian works and theories on Dujardin, see Léon Guichard’s 1963 *La Musique et les lettres en France au temps du Wagnérisme* (220), or Kathleen McKilligan’s *Édouard Dujardin: Les Lauriers sont coupés and the Interior Monologue* (1977) in which she points out that Dujardin did not mention Wagner in his letter of intention about *Les Lauriers sont coupés* to his friend the journalist Vittorio Pica, although he devotes some attention to Racine (96). As for the overuse of the undefined adjective “Wagnerian” concerning Dujardin, see Karl Uitti’s *The Concept of Self in the Symbolist Novel* (1961) in which he claims to have spotted an abundance of Wagnerian motifs in *Les Lauriers* (47).

which has since been followed by Cécile Leblanc's large-scale study, *Wagnérisme et création en France* (2005), with one chapter dedicated to Dujardin, and more recently by a musicologist, Steven Huebner, in his in-depth article "Édouard Dujardin, Wagner, and the Origins of Stream of Consciousness Writing" (2013). Another important contribution has just come from historian Kelly Maynard with "The Ill-Equipped Modernist: Historicizing Édouard Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés*" (2017).

I aim to include some of their findings here while giving special prominence to the issue of desire, be it sexual or imitative. This includes a reflection on the specifics of fin-de-siècle eroticism, which has been placed at the forefront of recent Wagnerian scholarship, and is also a frequent topic in the study of decadence. In this, I would unravel a similar thread as the literary critic Ben Hutchinson who has written of the sexual tension driving *Les Lauriers sont coupés* being the result of the concomitant influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner on its author ("Modernism and the Erotics of Style" 218).²² However, I mean to go further than Hutchinson and contend that all of Dujardin's texts written in the 1880s and early 1890s, not just *Les Lauriers*, demonstrate the central importance of sexuality in his thinking, as the final lines from the 1898 novel, *L'Initiation au péché et à l'amour* would show: "Pour qui s'attaque au problème de l'existence, le livre chaste paraît une impossibilité. La bête est la moitié de l'homme, a dit à peu près Pascal... S'il s'agit d'être sincère, la licence doit avoir sa place, inévitablement ou presque, dans le livre comme dans la vie" (8). I shall argue that this emphasis on—sensual, artistic, personal—longing was not just typical of Symbolist narrative in general, but was also very much embedded in Wagnerian poetics.

²² Specialists in fin-de-siècle literature, like Jean-Pierre Bertrand or Valérie-Michelet Jacquod, may rather see *Les Lauriers* as the product of its age, a text in line with *À rebours*, *Sixtine* and *Paludes*, the main novels defining the phenomenon of "le roman célibataire." The problem here is that their narrative does not account for Dujardin's concomitant Wagnerian activities and does not "situat[e] *Les Lauriers sont coupés* in a web of Dujardin's other contemporaneous writing," to reprise Steven Huebner's rationale in pursuing his probe of the connection between Wagnerism and Modernist writing techniques such as the interior monologue. (58)

If Dujardin was less than forthcoming about the sexual pull exerted by Wagner's works, it was likely because such an admission would have been difficult at a time during which Wagner was frowned upon by polite society. Once more, this hypothesis seems to be corroborated by an unpublished—and undated—document from Dujardin's personal papers, which suggests he was only capable of making the sensual component of Wagner's music dramas explicit in later years, as he perhaps became less inhibited with age:

Enfin, il n'y a pas longtemps que, dans un travail célèbre, un critique allemand, nous ouvrant les yeux, faisait remarquer quelle part énorme l'érotisme, pour dire le mot, prenait dans la musique de Wagner. Cela expliquait combien nous avons été, combien nous restons séduits par la Walkyrie; cette musique nous prend par les sens, nous tiraille les nerfs. C'est toujours, même [sic] et surtout dans les scènes religieuses de Parsifal, c'est toujours le Vénusberg ("Tannhäuser et les Wagnériens" 8 HRC Box 11.4)

Although the German critic's identity remains unclear, what is rather more apparent in this passage is the nineteenth-century critical consensus surrounding Wagner, a time when his blatant eroticism was seen as more shocking than his revolutionary politics and his rabid anti-Semitism.²³ Although Dujardin may not quite have been fully aware of the extent of his attraction to Wagnerian art, the lure of Wagnerian music scintillates in most of the texts he penned in the 1880s.

It should however be noted that there is a striking difference between Dujardin's reverential Wagnerian criticism—in the *Revue* and other publications—and the more adventurous take on Wagner he exhibited in his fiction, the space where he may perhaps have felt more able to exorcise and exercise his impossible desire to emulate Wagnerian drama's success in conveying complete emotional truths *without recourse to music*. My conviction is that Dujardin's published fiction, unlike some of his highly reverent unpublished and/or aborted texts, reacted to the Wagnerian

²³ Here I am paraphrasing Laurence Dreyfus's argument in *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse*.

seduction—and the submission it demanded from the listener—by subjecting some of Wagner’s themes to a lighthearted treatment.²⁴

It was Wagner’s masterful titillation of his listeners, I contend, that prompted a pressing need in Dujardin to reawaken a similar sensuality in his own writing. To be more specific, I do not mean to suggest that he was either quite a disciple or a rival of Wagner; rather, he quite innocently aspired to capture the perceived genius of the composer-poet, all the while knowing that emulating him completely was a lost cause. Dujardin’s case is not an isolated one, it is reminiscent of the idolizing gaze of Stendhal on Cimarosa, or of Wyzewa’s fixation on making his protagonists—who were otherwise perfect alter egos—composers.²⁵ In *Le Cas Frederick Nietzsche*, he expressed a sense of longing towards Wagner that is certainly comparable to Stendhal’s debt to Cimarosa, both for its sad recognition of musical impotence and its simultaneous yearning for complete possession: “Pour ce qui concerne particulièrement Wagner, j’ai pu dire que son œuvre a été celle qu’eût été la mienne, si les dieux avaient voulu que...” (*Le Cas Frederick Nietzsche* 1). Such an admission is akin to creative defeat, one in which the disciple does not succeed in engaging with the works of the master critically and regresses into worship.²⁶

²⁴ Several unpublished texts at the HRC testify to Dujardin’s attempts at aping Wagnerian music drama more literally, none of which ever came to fruition. One such example is the undated libretto or *poème dramatique* entitled *Thusnelda*, after a Germanic princess who was captured by the Romans during wartime (Box 11.4). The author’s annotations make clear he had no intention to compose the music, specifying that the musician may make cuts here and there. If the subject matter is reminiscent of Bellini’s *Norma* (1831), stylistically, Dujardin’s poetic language has little in common with either *bel canto* or Barbier & Carré, the most successful French librettists of the second half of the nineteenth century. Rather, it bears the mark of Racine’s influence. *Thusnelda* may be proof that perhaps Dujardin did contemplate a career as a librettist in the vein of Catulle Mendès’s libretto for Emmanuel Chabrier, *Gwendoline* (1886). At any rate, the only surviving collaboration between Dujardin and another composer is a song cycle by his friend Xavier Perreau, *Chansons du rivage* (1913).

²⁵ The young Stendhal wrote this revealing note in his approximate Italian: “Credo ch’el amor mio per Cimarosa vienne di ciò ch’elli fa nascere delle sensazioni pareilles [sic] a quelle che desidero di far nascere un giorno” (quoted in Seylaz 40). / “I believe that my love for Cimarosa stems from the fact that he gives birth to sensations that are similaires to the ones that I hope to give birth to one day.” (My translation) As for Wyzewa, both Valbert in *Valbert* (1893) and Étienne Brichet in *Le Cahier rouge* (1917) are composers.

²⁶ This would bring about the possibility that Dujardin’s relationship to Wagner resembled the *Tessera* model identified by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), but only partially, as the act of antithetical completion never fully came to fruition.

This chapter will be divided into three parts, each devoted to one specific aspect of the new Wagnerian work of art as theorized by Dujardin and Wyzewa: its totalizing ambition first, its redefinition of the artist as a truth-teller next, and finally its capacity to be malleable enough to reflect our impulses, fears and needs in a manner that imitates live theater. I shall finish with a close reading of *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, an ironic novella that seems to suggest Dujardin entertained a conflicted relationship with his own Wagnerian aspirations, a viewpoint that has been left out of recent studies devoted to Dujardin's involvement with Wagnerian thought. This ambivalence, I contend, is made apparent in Dujardin's explicit musical references in the text, all of which quote from popular music and French operetta instead of Wagner.

Liberating Poetry From the Yoke of Rationalism: The Work of Art as Synthesis

Like the twenty-year-old Dujardin, any first-time listener of the *Ring* cycle can only be struck by its monumental proportions. It is perhaps one of the few works of the Western canon that makes no secret of its ambition to cast its far-reaching net over our entire world and contain it within the span of its fifteen hours. Many critics have taken note of Wagner's totalizing aesthetic, be it in the scrupulous detailing of his own life in the multi-volume autobiography, *Mein Leben* (1870-1880), or in the unprecedented length of the *Ring* cycle. According to Adorno, "Es ist eine von Totalität: der Ring sucht, ohne viel Umstände zu machen, den Weltprozeß als ganzen einzufangen" (94). / "The basic idea is that of totality: the *Ring* attempts, without much ado, nothing less than the encapsulation of the world process as a whole" (90). In Wagnerian thinking, the condition behind the work of art's ability to manufacture the impression of wholeness for its spectator has to do with the union of various art forms, catering to discrete human senses. By stimulating them all at once, Wagner theorized, he would craft a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that could bind

the people together. However, this concept was not pulled out of a vacuum and bore its load of nostalgia in its inspiration. Indeed, Wagner took his cue from Greek tragedy, which he saw as the purest form of expression of Athenian public consciousness due to its supposedly unique blend of song, dance and recitation. He believed it was his mission to restore that fragile equilibrium—which he saw as having been ruptured in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War—and perform for modern Germany what Greek drama had accomplished for the Athenians’—momentary—achievement of political unity.²⁷

This prelapsarian vision of history informed Wagner’s artistic *telos*: in the face of what he perceived to be the widespread commodification of the performing arts, where opera was the chief offender because of its vocal and financial excesses, he sought to remind the public of theatre’s original political and religious dimensions. However, in order to perform such a feat, he conjectured, one needed to trick a passive audience that was too accustomed to cheap entertainment. This he did through his usage of myth, which he assumed to be relevant for all time: “Das Unvergleichliche des Mythos ist, daß er jederzeit wahr und sein Inhalt, bei dichtester Gedrängtheit, für alle Zeiten unerschöpflich ist” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, IV 64). / “The incomparable fact about myth is that it is true at all times and, its content, by virtue of poetic compression, is inexhaustible” (My translation). In Wagner’s mind, myth was only a tool to get to the core, the “rein menschlich,” or “purely human” concerns at the bottom of every single person’s consciousness; it would bind us all together as a species.²⁸

²⁷ See *The Artwork of the Future* (1849) and Wagner’s denunciation of the Peloponnesian War as the event that introduced “the worm of general egoism” into Athenian public consciousness: “Aber als man aus Athen seine Blicke nach Sparta richtete, nagte bereits der Wurm des gemeinsamen Egoismus verderblich auch an diesem schönen Staate” (*Gesammelte Schriften* III 162). / “Yet when the Athenians turned their eyes on Sparta, the worm of destructive egoism was already gnawing away at that beautiful state” (*The Artwork of the Future* 65).

²⁸ In spite of the concept’s assumed inclusivity, Wagner’s *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1850/1869) would nuance the universality of the *rein menschlich* and point to the fact that, for the composer, some listeners (read, Germans) were more adept at catching his message than others.

As it happens, Dujardin was very much aware of Wagner's objectives: "il fait un drame, mais ce drame, prétexte, concession, est le secours à notre faiblesse; c'est lui qui, repaissant la chair, laisse l'âme libre, oui, d'entendre son langage et d'admettre, oui, librement, la poignance de ses motifs, et de subir le flux effroyable de cette vie idéale" (*La Revue de Genève* XI 259). Much as Lucretius recommended using honeyed cups in order to bypass the horrendous taste of wormwood medicine, Wagner's recourse to medieval legends was an oblique means of accessing more or less palatable truths concerning human nature—as his treatment of greed in the *Ring* or his representation of unquenchable lust for absolute power in *Lohengrin* would suggest—without making the process too off-putting or frightening.

Interweaving such stories with titillating musical strategies was the foundation upon which Wagner based his cult of personality. Operatic singing, sets, costumes and poetry were not just utilized to awaken the senses, they were calibrated to make his audience aware of all the various parts composing their selves, be it their libido, intellect or emotional center, in a process of transubstantiation thus described by Adorno: "Die permanente Vergegenwärtigung (...) verfolgt den Zweck, alles starr Gegenständliche der Dichtung, und damit den Reflex der Warenwelt im Kunstwerk, durch Verflüssigung und Verlebendigung in den Schein reiner subjektiver Aktualität überzuführen" (92). / "The aim of this process is to dissolve and revitalize the unyielding thing-like nature of poetry, and with it the reflex of the world of commodities in art, and so to transform it into the radiant manifestation of pure subjective actuality" (88). However, it was not just the subjective mind that would find a representation of itself in music drama, but also the human body, as Vernon Lee argued in her brilliant 1911 essay, "The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner," writing of Wagner's music that it laid bare its listeners' body and psyche, with the music magically conjuring up the image of a breathing human figure through its abstract language:

It tells us the inner changes, the ebbings and flowings, the curdlings and rushings, the damming up and flooding, the irresistible breakers and the deepest tricklings and droppings of our life. Wagner possesses a miraculous intuition for the emotional changes in circulation and respiration, the movements of pulse, of heart, of all the shrinking and quaking; inner and outer... (*The Fortnightly Review* LXXXIX 873)

The *Gesamtkunstwerk*, then, can be envisaged as the most complete mimetic representation of human beings since the Greeks, its devastating self-evidence being comparable to a flood, an aquatic image that transpires both in Lee's article and in Dujardin's delayed analysis of his first Wagnerian concert.

Any future attempts to write literature taking into account the experience of Wagnerian totality would therefore have to provide as complete a mental and bodily picture of its characters/its main character to the reader. According to Wyzewa, if Wagner had succeeded in depicting "la vie totale de l'Univers, c'est à dire de l'Âme, où se joue le drame varié que nous appelons l'Univers," there was no reason for future literary works not to do the same. (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 102) In so doing, he was echoing Édouard Schuré's prophetic terms from 1876, which heralded a glorious new aesthetic age prompted by the absorption and adaptation of the Wagnerian lesson: "Cette union nouvelle, si jamais elle s'accomplissait, serait elle-même le signe certain, l'image rayonnante d'une régénération intime de l'homme morcelé par le cours des siècles et qui cherche à se ressaisir dans l'harmonie de son corps, de son âme et de sa pensée" (*Le Drame musical* II 365). The pursuit of Plato's hermaphrodite, that is the tripartite representation—body, soul and thought—of complete human beings in fiction was the lofty goal pursued by Wyzewa and like-minded Symbolists in their own "Wagnerian" works. In this light, Symbolism reveals itself to be a movement obsessed with recreating the illusion of pulsating brains and hearts in its

prose works. But its reputation as a hyper-intellectual school of thought shows it failed to do this desideratum full justice.²⁹

In proposing a multifaceted picture of inner life as well as in its putting forward of bodies striving for extremes due to its great vocal demands on the singers, the implicit assertion put forward by Wagnerian drama was that other forms of artistic expression were now to be considered obsolete due to their fundamental incompleteness. Once listeners had dipped their toes into the waters of such an incomparable spectacle, Wagnerites surmised, it would be impossible to go back to lesser forms of art. As Dujardin exhorted his readers in the first issue of the *Revue wagnérienne*: “il faut choisir, se décider,” while insisting that “l’œuvre de Wagner accapare toute l’attention” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 1-2). There was no room for compromise: the question posed by Wagner was one of total adherence to his vision, or of absolute rejection. And one of the deciding factors was whether or not one agreed to be considered a sexual person governed by sexual impulses.

Along with his expert sexual manipulation of listeners through his music, Wagner’s acute understanding of human psychology was one of the main reasons why his program crystallized as much admiration as resentment.³⁰ This emotional perspicacity is in fact the domain in which his music dramas can measure up to the achievement of Realist novelists of Balzac and Tolstoy, and it was surely the grounds for which Dujardin kept insisting on Wagner’s unparalleled merits as a

²⁹ Later critics, such as Proust in “Contre l’obscurité,” criticized Symbolism for being so intellectual as to deny life’s pleasures. This was also the opinion of Jacques Rivière who defined the Symbolist work as essentially negative: “l’œuvre est soumise non pas aux inspirations confuses d’un génie naïf et ignorant, mais à toutes les forces dissolvantes, à tous les acides de la pensée. Ils l’attaquent, ils la rongent, ils l’évident peu à peu, en enlevant tous les éléments matériels” (“Le roman d’aventure” 752).

³⁰ The association between the enjoyment of Wagnerian music and drug use is a trope in testimonies from listeners and performers alike. One notable example is *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, (1889) which elaborates on Nietzsche’s own difficulties in ridding himself of his addiction to the composer’s music. In *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, he goes as far as to claim that *Parsifal* is a poison: “Denn der Parsifal ist ein Werk der Tücke, der Rachsucht, der heimlichen Giftmischerei gegen die Voraussetzungen des Lebens, ein schlechtes Werk” (*Nietzsche contra Wagner* 21). / “For *Parsifal* is a work of perfidy, of vindictiveness, of a secret attempt to poison the presuppositions of life—a *bad* work” (*The Portable Nietzsche* 675).

poet: “son drame existe, littérairement, comme un roman dialogué; – il est le musicien révélateur de l’essence musicale, et son orchestre a appris à exprimer, – clairement (pour la première fois), – les ineffables intimités des âmes” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 162). In sum, Wagner’s most important contribution to the arts was that he did make his orchestra—not just his words—as eloquent as a detailed monologue from a Racinian play.³¹

If the French Symbolists, and Dujardin among them, did sincerely admire Wagnerian art, they also demonstrated a coexisting impulse towards resistance. Their originality as a group of Wagnerian writers lay in developing a middle ground where they boldly reinterpreted Wagnerian theories, especially concerning the notion of wholeness. This departure, I believe, came about through a reflection on French literary history led by Wyzewa and reprised by Dujardin. For one, Wyzewa's narrative very much resembles Wagner’s, as he conveyed disappointment with the literature of the past couple of centuries, which he criticized for proposing only a partial image of mankind. However, unlike Wagner, Wyzewa's explanation for this perceived failure had little to do with the public’s frivolity and rather more with the dominance of rationality in literary works to the detriment of other forms of thought.

In the summer of 1886, the two friends published their separate findings regarding the first utterances of a future French “Wagnerian” artistic school.³² Rather ambitiously, Wyzewa devised the foundations of the budding movement in the *Revue wagnérienne* with a trilogy of articles dedicated to painting, literature and music, respectively. In Wyzewa’s estimation, if the novel had

³¹ For a refutation of Wagner’s theories of the union of music and drama, see Hanslick’s *On the Musically Beautiful* who sees opera as a compromise tilted towards the music. Musical adaptations of poetic texts could only be justified if they “etwas ganz Neues hinzubringt, das in ureigner Schönheitskraft blättertreibend die Worte zum bloßen Epheuspalier umschafft” (*Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* 21). / “bring in something new which recreates the words as a mere trellis upon which to climb and spread its own beautiful foliage...” (16).

³² Jean-Nicolas Illouz designates the *Sonnets à Wagner* published in the January 1886 issue of the *Revue wagnérienne* as the first sign of the “phase proprement manifestaire du Symbolisme” representing “la première manifestation collective d’une école qui ne dispose pas encore de son nom, mais qui se reconnaît déjà dans une commune religion du ‘dieu Richard Wagner’” (“Les manifestes symbolistes” 97).

not been able to compete with music in offering a compelling image of the world of Ideas, it was because it had shied away from specific parts of human consciousness and privileged one angle to the detriment of all others: our capacity for reasoning in abstract terms.³³

The culprit, Wyzewa argued, was Descartes, “Le promoteur véritable de la littérature moderne, le seul père intellectuel de nos âges, est le philosophe René Descartes. Jamais un homme n’a exercé sur son temps une influence aussi vive” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 158). The French philosopher, he added, was so certain of the untrustworthiness of our senses that he emphasized reason to the detriment of all other forms of cognition and expression. Following in his footsteps came Racine, a poet who was just as enamored of rationalism and supposedly created a new literary form to reflect Descartes’s *cogito*: the novel. His great stroke of genius was that he used an existing genre—Greek tragedy—and altered it, ridding the stage of its action and promoting discussion in its stead, so as to better reflect his vision of humanity: “Les tragédies de Racine furent des romans psychologiques, restituant dans l’art la vie rationnelle des passions...” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 159).³⁴ This classical tradition was able to consolidate its hegemony over the French literary landscape until the Romantics began developing a new awareness of the sensory world and emphasized their individuality in their poetry. Yet, according to Wyzewa, none of them dared go

³³ For Wyzewa, abstract thinking (“notions”) was one of the three elements he believed to be part of the tripartite nature of human consciousness along with our sensations and emotions. To each of these parts corresponds a specific art form: sensations are awakened by the visual arts, notions are reflected in literature and emotion, the more elusive domain of consciousness, is stimulated by music: “La peinture, la littérature, la musique, suggèrent seulement un mode de la vie. Or la vie est l’union intime de ses trois modes” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 105). To this multidimensional picture of life corresponds a work of art imitating life in its totality, the “Wagnerian” artwork.

³⁴ Racine’s alleged involvement with the novelistic form is of course factually inaccurate yet it reappears in Dujardin’s dedication of *Les Lauriers* to Racine whom he called the “suprême romancier des âmes.” Here he took inspiration from Wyzewa’s article for *La Revue wagnérienne* on “Wagnerian literature,” one in which Wyzewa sees the inception of the novel as having occurred with Plato’s dialogues, a theory he shared with Nietzsche who wrote in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*: “Wirklich hat für die ganze Nachwelt Plato das Vorbild einer neuen Kunstform gegeben, das Vorbild des Romans” (99) / “Plato truly gave, for all posterity, the paradigm of a new art form, the paradigm of the novel” (My translation). According to Wyzewa, the tradition of Platonic dialogue was picked up by 17th-century playwrights concerned with rationality and controlling one’s “passions” like Racine. Thus, in Wyzewa and Dujardin’s eyes, the novelistic form is implicitly associated with the values of rationalism.

far enough in their efforts to revitalize literature and restore it to the state of wholeness it allegedly enjoyed at the time of Homer.

Dujardin's vision of literary history, as exposed in the July 1886 article, "Richard Wagner et la poésie française contemporaine," published in *La Revue de Genève*, very much echoed Wyzewa's. In similar fashion, he was of the opinion that the seventeenth century had inaugurated an era exclusively preoccupied with logic: "Donc, un langage abstrait, une littérature abstraite; analysant les plus subtiles phénomènes de l'âme, Racine expliquait, par des démonstrations précisément scientifiques et rationnelles, les mécaniques successions des idées. Deux siècles avait duré le système" (*La Revue de Genève* XI 253). To a mechanistic vision of the human mind, which denies it any impulse towards irrationality and scoffs at the notion of parts of our consciousness being inaccessible to reason, corresponded a language focused on clarity and precision, but incomplete in its reluctance to engage with the entire range of human experience.

Along with Wagner, Dujardin chose another hero in his shared quest to salvage poetry from two centuries' worth of rationality. It was the tutelary figure of Victor Hugo himself, whose 1885 passing caused many to feel a sense of void.³⁵ Hugo's greatest achievement, Dujardin reasoned, was that he had liberated the poetic word from the shackles of the traditional rules of versification—identified by Dujardin as abstract, therefore arbitrary conventions incapable of representing individual variations and subtler emotions—rendering them supple enough to bend them to an accurate rendering of his musings. According to Dujardin, Hugo's rationale was to give full rein to his inner orchestra, a convenient metaphor for the mind in its multiplicity and perpetual

³⁵ Mallarmé's poem to Wagner, "Hommage à Wagner," makes use of the image of a crumbling pillar, which has been associated with Victor Hugo's death by commentators such as L.J. Austin in *Essais sur Mallarmé* (36-65).

contradictions, thus paving the way to cater to its rational/irrational impulses, its conscious/unconscious thoughts, etc.:

(...) et voilà que le poète, soudain, entasse les milliers d'insolites mots, mots populaires, mots techniques, mots étrangers, mots archaïques ; et les mots, par leurs sonorités étranges, font des phrases étrangement sonores, des cliquetis verbaux ; et naissent des fanfares et des mélodies de consonances; et est évoquée, non plus par des signes abstraits conventionnels, mais par des vivants signes, sonores, sensationnels, la nature (253).

Thus, the piling up of words of all origins becomes a means of mimetically representing all three components that Wyzewa understood to be forming the human psyche: notions, sensations and emotions.

As such, these combinations can never be fully grasped by the poet. They take on their metaphysical resonance almost by accident, merely by virtue of being assembled together. Under these circumstances, the poet is purely a facilitator in the construction of the poetic edifice, which becomes alive not because of his intervention, but *in spite* of it. Yet this phenomenon can only occur if the creator has shunned his pretensions at ordering words according to a pre-configured order, preferring to embrace his inner logic instead.³⁶ This was the condition behind the invention of free verse, a potent tool in challenging both poetry and prose's infatuation with reasoning and structural symmetry. Accepting this new impersonal dynamic was a humbling process, but one that later became a defining characteristic of Symbolism, as Dujardin recognized in the 1930s: "Nous fûmes ceux qui libérèrent la poésie du joug du rationalisme" ("Le monologue intérieur" 255). In the act of letting go, a closer relationship of reciprocity between the poet's inner life and

³⁶ Wyzewa describes a similar trajectory for Mallarmé in "Notes sur l'œuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé": "Nous avons aujourd'hui une habitude d'écrire funeste, prise au collège, et qui nous rend incapable d'une expression artistique. Nous concevons nos phrases, d'abord, à l'état de raisonnements abstraits (...) devant le papier, nous déformons notre vision première pour mettre dans nos phrases des mots trouvés après coup, et pour les asservir à des tournures convenues, plaisamment appelées grammaticales, comme si l'unique grammaire n'était point la logique naturelle, ordonnant toutes les idées dans notre âme ! (...) M. Mallarmé (...) a voulu vivre d'abord la phrase entière, c'est-à-dire l'idée toute, avec ses détails, leurs plans divers, les attitudes et les nuances des sensations. Puis, il a sincèrement écrit sur le papier toute sa vision de cette idée : il nous a restitué intacte la phrase vécue : respectant l'ordre des sensations, les incidences, les plans qu'occupaient les parties diverses de l'idée, dans son âme" (*Nos Maîtres* 110).

his poetry manifested itself. Accordingly, poetic modernity quickly became synonymous with a subjective turn, eloquently characterized by Gustave Kahn with his snappy motto, “objectiver le subjectif.”³⁷

Although I just noted Symbolism’s attraction towards the questioning of such well-established dichotomies as rational/irrational, clarity/obscurity, etc., I also underlined that its proponents understood these concepts to be not in static opposition, but rather as forces working conjointly within the human mind, which they knew to be in a state of perpetual agitation. This was the reason behind their desire to achieve Wagnerian synthesis in their writings: they craved the ability to present as truthful a picture of complex human motivations to the reader as possible and one that would be immediately coherent to the spectator/reader.

Where the work of Symbolist writers differs from Wagner’s, however, is that they knew that the full detailing of the contents of a character’s psychology is an impossibility and the work of self-analysis that often serves as a prelude to creative writing would lead them to contemplate an abyss, this “quelque chose d’occulte au fond de tous (...) quelque chose d’abscons, signifiant fermé et caché, qui habite le commun,” which Mallarmé had identified as the part of the self most connected to the “Mystère” (*Œuvres complètes* II 239-240). In effect, in its capacity as an abstract language, music is in a better position when it comes to letting the “Mystery” speak for itself without having to undergo any conceptualization or rationalization. In the absence of music’s cohesive powers, poetry—and poetically enhanced prose—has to content itself with placing gaps and ambiguities in the text. In sum, Symbolist prose is one in which epistemological doubt is allowed to barge, although the text itself still aims for elusive totality.

³⁷ The exact quote from Kahn goes as follows: “Le but essentiel de notre art est d’objectiver le subjectif (l’extériorisation de l’Idée) au lieu de subjectiver l’objectif (la nature vue à travers un tempérament). Donc, pousser l’analyse du moi à l’extrême, faire concorder la multiplicité et l’entrelacement des rythmes avec la mesure de l’Idée...” (*L’Événement* September 28, 1886).

The hybrid poem, *Pour la vierge du roc ardent*, published in *La Revue indépendante* in 1888, a literary review Dujardin directed from 1886 until 1889, best exemplifies Dujardin's temptation towards artistic synthesis and his literary answer to the Wagnerian paradigm. It is also perhaps the most immediately theatrical work in his corpus notwithstanding the dramatic trilogy, *La Légende d'Antonia*, which flopped when its dreamy dialogues and lengthy self-examining monologues were confronted with the realities of stage execution and the impatience of the audience.³⁸ By contrast, *Pour la vierge*'s theatrical aspirations never strike the reader as self-indulgent because of its thoroughly experimental nature, which constantly manages to surprise both formally and tonally. In effect, the piece distinguishes itself as a hybrid poem merging two types of writing,—prose and free verse—which are usually understood to be odd bedfellows, or a perfect illustration for French Wagnerian literature, as outlined by Suzanne Bernard:

Cette idée de la fusion des arts, les jeunes poètes et théoriciens de la Revue wagnérienne, fondée en 1885 par Dujardin et Chamberlain, la transposèrent sur le plan purement littéraire : ils eurent l'ambition de créer une littérature "wagnérienne" unissant les différents genres littéraires, la poésie jouant le rôle d'élément musical, la prose d'élément intellectuel (*Mallarmé et la musique* 19).

With its four prose sections devoted to the detailing of a young man's fanciful romantic life alternating with four *entrées de ballet* in free verse, *Pour la vierge* is a strange literary object to say the least. Perhaps it aimed to illustrate Mallarmé's theories on ballet as the one art form "capable, par son écriture sommaire, de traduire le fugace et le soudain jusqu'à l'Idée," yet none of the dancers invoked by the text communicate with gesture, preferring instead to make oneiric speeches (*Œuvres complètes* II 154). Their role is thus more reminiscent of the one assumed by a

³⁸ As noted by Kathleen McKilligan, the main problem was one of length: "The actual substance of *La Légende d'Antonia* is very thin, in fact, quite inadequate to sustain a three-part exposition as in Dujardin's trilogy" ("Theory and Practice in French Wagnerian Drama: Édouard Dujardin and *La Légende d'Antonia*" 284). It also should be noted that Dujardin went back to theater later in life with another trilogy, *Les Argonautes* (1923-1925), which was first published in another literary review he directed, *Les Cahiers idéalistes*.

Greek chorus insofar as they punctuate the young man's ongoing narrative with their cryptic commentary.

On a thematic level, *Pour la vierge du roc ardent* presents its dramatic conflict in the form of an oxymoron, which is foreshadowed by the title in the opposition of the virginal and the sexually passionate implied by "ardent." Moreover, the very first line makes sure to orchestrate the clash between the narrator's base reality and his higher aspirations that will come to define the entire poem: "Entre les résignations à la vie commune et nécessaire, l'idée, par le vivace jamais aboli du mieux entrevu, par le tressaut [sic] des luttes contre le pis accepté, par la puissance en tout esprit incluse de sa divinisation, un jour s'exaltera" (*La Revue indépendante* 23 323). This longing for a Mallarmean "Idea" is mirrored by the protagonist's development of an imaginary love story as a means of overcoming the boredom induced by his loveless marital arrangement. Here, for the first time, we are presented with a figure that shall become familiar throughout my analyses of Dujardin's texts: a young bourgeois man, torn between the societal pressure towards respectability and his artistic leanings, the same friction extending into an opposition between marriage and joyful sexuality: "la marée âcre du quotidien et du charnel" (*Idem*). The reference to carnal desire as the main antithesis—and remedy—for everyday banality is reminiscent of Wagner's own viewpoint, which saw uninhibited romantic love as a pillar for the new community he wished to build through his art works.

In the wake of a courtship gone nowhere with a mysterious woman, the narrator ponders over his subsequent unexciting engagement with another, a reputable young lady ironically nicknamed "Mademoiselle Quelques-étoiles." By means of compensation, he projects himself into a relationship with an idealized woman standing in for the one he lost: "Vierge, ainsi tout à coup, par cette nuit d'ennuis, je pense ta virginité ardente au long des rocs ardens; et sévit le désir de toi,

et l'esprit, te méditant, t'atteint" (Idem). This female figure—herself an oxymoron, both pure and sexually aware—explicitly recalls the character of Brünnhilde, who at the end of *Walküre* is condemned by her father, Wotan, to remain a sleeping prisoner safely encircled by a barrier of fire on top of a mountain. After having been set free by the hero Siegfried, she warns him of her hybrid nature as a former immortal being who has just become human through her newly awakened sexual desire for him: "Ob jetzt ich dein? Göttliche Ruhe rast mir in Wogen; keuschestes Licht lodert in Gluten..." (*Siegfried* Akt III, scene 3). / "Whether I'm now yours? Waves of divine peace surge into my being, a light most chaste blazes forth" (*The Ring of the Nibelung* 533). Her extraordinary ability to remain pure while also indulging her lover sexually is of course an impossible mirage, and one that can only be enjoyed in the work of fiction.

The next character featured in *Pour la vierge* makes its appearance on the stage as a dancing soloist. It is a nameless and genderless angel, designated as "L'insexué." Most importantly, this being seems to possess a memory of ancient hermaphrodite couplings—as recounted in Aristophanes's banquet speech in Plato's *Symposium*—which they impart to those who come to them in a dream, motivated by "la nostalgie des merveilles" (324). Their function as a wise ancient entity is one of guidance for those who strive to emulate the perfect fusion represented by the hermaphrodite. They are, however, doubtful of the potential for such unions to take place in real life: "Le principe est puissant des conjonctions/Les possibilités sont de toutes les unions/Mais qui pourra conjoindre les coïtions ?" (Idem) Although they acknowledge the possibility that an individual male and individual female—figuratively, lovers coming from the northern and southern hemisphere to be joined together: "L'amant est au nord, au sud est l'amante"—may be driven by the same longing for unity, they warn men and women of the likelihood that the gulf between them will remain in place, in spite of their best efforts to overcome it: "L'univers entre

eux se lamente” (Ibidem). For a reader well acquainted with *Oper und Drama* (1851) and its central sexual metaphor, that is the felicitous birth of music drama through the amalgamation of man (*logos*) and female (music), the androgyne’s words of caution nuance the possibility for a similar synthesis to take place in reality.³⁹

I find it tempting to read the homophonic pairing “l’amante” and “lamente” as two sides of the same coin, the first one highlighting the inescapability of difference in heterosexual couplings and the other revealing the impossibility of identity between individuals.⁴⁰ This recognition prompts the most enigmatic but captivating verse in this section: “Ceux nés pour soi ne seront pas de soi” (325). I interpret it as a clever play on words, one in which “pour soi” suggests exteriority, while “de soi” means born of or from oneself, in other words, something that is originating from the inside. With this lack of resolution between pour soi/de soi, the unbridgeable chasm between north and south, male and female, internal and external remains in place and seems to hint at the fate of a Symbolist narrative catering to all parts of the self at once without capturing subjectivity accurately. If it is drafted with the sole purpose of pleasing the writer in a self-indulgent manner, that is “pour soi,” it will not be self-evident/“aller de soi.”

Here I would like to ponder over a potential relationship of reciprocity between fictional romantic desire—the inaccessible real or imagined love object—and the elusive synthetic *telos* pursued by Dujardin in his own works. It is a matter of no coincidence that the fusional romantic dream exposed in *Pour la vierge* mirrors the aspiration of the Symbolist author towards perfect

³⁹ According to Jean-Jacques Nattiez, this search for totality in Wagner’s works was based on nostalgia, much like Aristophanes’s myth of the hermaphrodite in Plato’s *Symposium*: “la nostalgie de l’androgynie primitive, la recherche d’une androgynie à réinstaurer, faire que le deux (et au-delà, tous les multiples de deux) se ramène au un (...) réduire le tout à l’unique” (*Wagner Androgyne* 321). This longing translated itself through the erasure of sexual difference, for instance in the final union of *Tristan und Isolde*, as well as the incestuous relationships so prevalent in the *Ring* cycle.

⁴⁰ Both of these dreams, it should be noted, are prevalent in *Tristan und Isolde* where gender boundaries are weakened to the point of irrelevance. For an astute Freudian reading of *Tristan*, consult Lawrence Kramer’s *Music as Cultural Practice* (163-5).

intelligibility when it comes to sharing his interiority—and remaining true to its abstruse nature—with the reader. Neither fantasy of complete disclosure in writing or of absolute fusion through sexual intercourse can ever be fulfilled, nevertheless these elusive goals are worth pursuing if only because of the insights they may grant the idealistic artist along the way.

Furthermore, I would like to specify that this particular correspondence between a thematic element (the elusive female) and a formal *telos* (the impossible synthetic narrative) was not unique to Dujardin, rather it was a trait shared by other Symbolist writers such as Remy de Gourmont in *Sixtine* (1890) or Georges Rodenbach with *Bruges la Morte* (1892). Neither of the male narrators can fulfill their sexual desire due to the unavailability of the woman they love. In turn, this involuntary chastity engenders sexual frustration and morbid obsessions, all of which are sublimated into groundbreaking structures, where the splintered nature of the self in the process of compulsive self-examination is in full display.

The recurrence of those Platonic affairs in Symbolist and Decadent narratives is so noticeable that they have been identified as a trend by Jean-Pierre Bertrand in *Le Roman célibataire* (1996), where he describes fin-de-siècle protagonists as men who:

refusent d'être embrigadés dans les catégories littéraires apprises et figées (...) en eux cristallise l'utopie d'un monde romanesque totalement replié sur lui-même, doté d'une langue qui se met à l'abri de toute socialité en dehors de l'histoire, pour refaire en vase clos un univers à part entière, comble de l'artifice et de l'intellect. (17)

In light of this excerpt, the parallel between theme and form seems clear: going against the societal grain via accidental bachelorhood almost seems like a pre-requisite to formal experimentation. Consequently, both celibacy and literary innovation appear to be derived from the same need to shuffle norms around and claim a sense of individual agency in the face of overwhelming external

pressure to conform.⁴¹ As for the image of enclosure, or “vase clos,” it is another trope of fin-de-siècle narratives and their characteristic self-absorption, following the model of des Esseintes’s withdrawal from the world in *À rebours* (1884).

From a stylistic perspective, Dujardin’s desire to take leave from poetic norms and craft his individual type of poetry in order to reflect his subjectivity more accurately is noticeable through the use of numerous neologisms spread across the poem. For instance, in section II where the dancers see their bodies become “calorifiés,” an adjective based on “calorifère”, or in the third “entrée de ballet” where nighttime’s usual “ténèbres” are transformed into the more morbid “enténébrement.” Neologisms, it should be noted, are fixtures in Dujardin’s peculiar poetic style and were likely derived from his activity as a Wagnerian translator—as theorized by Cécile Leblanc and Steven Huebner—which frequently pushed him towards creating new French words that would better suit the particular blend of archaism and idiosyncrasy characteristic of Wagner’s poetic style.⁴² Another side effect of his translation practice is the abundance of alliterations following the pattern of the Wagnerian *Stabreim* as well as characteristically Germanic verb placements.⁴³ Dujardin’s willingness to play with rhythm for dramatic effect is also to be seen in

⁴¹ Remy de Gourmont was one of the first commentators to establish a link between staging one’s individual choices in Symbolist narratives in opposition to the type of determinism that was the bedrock of Naturalism: “Il n’y a aucun doute sur les tendances des nouvelles générations littéraires: elles sont rigoureusement antinaturalistes. (...) c’est individuellement que nous nous sommes éloignés avec horreur d’une littérature dont la bassesse nous faisait vomir” (*Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire* 135). This baseness, if we take Bertrand’s conflation of bachelorhood with formal experimentation, could also designate loveless marriages of convenience and the Symbolist refusal to engage with them in fiction. For more on the Symbolist cult of individuality, see Valérie Michelet-Jacquod’s first chapter in *Le Roman symboliste* (35-57).

⁴² Starting with *Das Rheingold*, one typical feature of Wagner’s poetry is the *Stabreim*, which, to quote Thomas S. Grey, is an “alliterative verse form used in old Germanic poetry (...) Wagner’s use of *Stabreim* in the *Ring* derives, naturally, from his ancient Teutonic sources. Traditionally, *Stabreim* was organized into verse-pairs of two (sometimes three) stresses each, which were unified by alliteration of the first and/or accented syllables. (...) Throughout the *Ring* Wagner experimented with countless alliterative patterns, often extending beyond the traditional pair of lines” (“A Wagnerian Glossary” in *The Wagner Compendium* 239-240).

⁴³ One striking example is featured in Dujardin’s take on the first scene of *Rheingold*, published in *La Revue wagnérienne* of October 1885, which features a daring neologism reflecting the oddity of the German pairing “das schlecke Geschlüpfer,” transformed into “la lèche-marche” in French, thereby rendering the strangeness of the original. For more details on this particular scene, see Huebner (65).

the profusion of ellipses, which effectively convey a sense of time passing by, as it does for example in section II: “j’adore la gentillesse de cette vigile de la fête de mariage... Heureux, mon fils, m’a dit ma mère, puisque vous vous aimez, et que ta situation est établie...” (329) All of these particularities are defining elements of Dujardin’s style and are also featured in the texts I shall delve into later in this chapter.

Beyond its stylistic parallels with Wagnerian drama, *Pour la vierge* distinguishes itself from the rest of Dujardin’s corpus with its great number of Wagnerian references, respectively from the *Ring* cycle, *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*. It may be surprising to learn that explicit allusions to Wagner in Dujardin’s literary writings is a rare phenomenon with only a few texts making clear references: a couple of short stories from *Les Hantises* (1886), “Le kabbaliste” and “L’enfer,” *Pour la vierge*, as well as two epigraphs in the trilogy of plays, *La Légende d’Antonia* (1891-1893). In contrast with these other texts, *Pour la vierge* should not be interpreted as a paean to Wagner’s accomplishments. Rather, its light parodic qualities can be construed as a sign of the poet’s ambition to be taken seriously because he was able to poke slight fun at the very man to whom he owed his small renown as an intellectual.⁴⁴

Two Wagnerian characters are introduced in the “deuxième entrée de ballet.” First, the reader is presented with muslin-clad girls, in other words, an echo of the flower maidens in *Parsifal*, a fact made explicit through the presence of botanical imagery in their self-presentation,

⁴⁴ It would be very tempting to understand Dujardin’s gentle mocking of Wagnerian characters as a Freudian “killing of the father” phase. In this light, the veiled criticism perceived in *Pour la vierge* seems to foreshadow Dujardin’s increasingly tepid feelings towards Wagnerian performances due to their ever-growing popularity and faulty/fragmentary execution, as made evident in the article “Les chagrins d’un vieux wagnérien” (*Le Figaro* May 18, 1893) and further confirmed with his response to an “Enquête sur l’influence allemande” conducted by Jacques Morland for the *Mercure de France* in January 1903: “Aujourd’hui, le spectacle est autre : triste au point de vue wagnérien, il est heureux peut-être au point de vue français. Wagner est à la mode, c’est-à-dire qu’il n’est plus aimé ni compris” (94). As Dujardin’s later production and personal papers would prove, he never disavowed Wagnerian art or the person of Wagner and held both in the highest regard throughout his life.

where the delicate nature of flowers is equated with virginity: “Fleurs au sol attachées (...) Fleurs de tiges jamais tachées...” (331) However, it quickly becomes apparent that this allusion is in fact a means of subverting the original with the maidens unashamedly confessing their desire to be “plucked,” by their future gardener-husband: “Vers le midi le jardinier viendra cueillir nos têtes prêtes (...) Il nous prendra vers le midi toutes défaites” (331). The poem gets even racier with its broken hymen imagery in which the “wound” caused by first-time sexual intercourse is confounded with its assumed result, that is, orgasm: “Oh que douces seront les blessures/Dont il ouvrira nos tiges pures/Oh l’irréfragable déchirure/Oh la délicieuse morsure/L’extase de cette meurtrissure (...) Au jour de la divine cueillure !” (332) If the original Wagnerian scene did indeed include a mention of wounds, those were inflicted on the men guarding Klingsor’s castle by Parsifal. In *Parsifal*, the warrior victims just happened to be betrothed to the flower maidens whose piercing cries of grief welcome the hero who has just injured them to the castle’s garden: “Mein Geliebter verwundet. Wo find’ ich den meinen?” (*Parsifal* Akt II) / “My beloved is wounded. Where can I find mine?” It is only a matter of minutes before these cunning creatures decide to move on from their bereavement and avenge themselves with an attack on the hero’s chastity and honor.

In Dujardin’s text, their alluring mixture of innocence and ruthlessness is trivialized with a quasi-Laforguian passage in which rhymes become shorter and shorter in order to grow more and more grotesque in their sexual innuendo and overall absurdity: “Nous attendons / A l’horizon / Viendra-t-il donc / Pour la moisson / De nos toisons (...) A travers ponts / Sur les balcons / En des blasons / Des pavillons / Pleins de lions...” (332) This dissolving of poetic language is not just impertinent; it could also be envisaged as reminiscent of Isolde’s Transfiguration, in which some

of her words arguably flirt with meaninglessness for all of their ecstasy.⁴⁵ In *Pour la vierge*, however, this lack of semantics serves a comedic purpose, which makes it impossible to take what I interpret to be an allusion to the woodbird's song in the second act of *Siegfried* seriously:

Siegfried, Siegfried, sur le roc de feu
 Cueille la fleur de feu
 Traverse le feu
 Ne crains pas le feu
 Sous la garde du feu
 Fleurit la fleur de feu
 Pour toi fleurit, oh cueille-la, la fleur de feu
 Cueille la fleur de feu. (333)

While the word “Feuer” occurs three times in the original, it is subjected to some variation, effecting a seamless semantic leap from the actual wall of fire to metaphorical flames symbolizing the hero's growing desire for the former Valkyrie. Conversely, in Dujardin's version, the endless repetition of the word “feu” seems like a missed opportunity for a striking poetic image, becoming mere parroting of the Wagnerian trope instead. The next ballet section further cements the overall impression of light Wagnerian parody with a group of courtesans who rather incongruously appeal to the highest form of love, that is, the Eternal feminine or “l'Antonia de la pensée” (336). Seemingly, in the poetic world of *Pour la vierge*, vice and virtue are interchangeable, so are poetic metaphors and dull reiterations.

The final Wagnerian echo occurs in a prose section, thus running contrary to the structure of the poem, which up to that point saw its prose passages solely concerned with the narrator's romantic life, while the poetic interludes were the locus of oneiric digressions. In this fourth and final prose piece, the protagonist is seen defiantly taking on the guise of Tristan as he dreams of

⁴⁵ This semantic blur occurs while Isolde describes the silent melody she alone can hear: “Hör ich nur diese Weise, die so wundervoll und leise, Wonne klagend, alles sagend, mild versöhnend aus ihm tönend, in mich dringet, auf sich schwinget, hold erhallend um mich klinget?” (*Tristan und Isolde* Akt III)

what could have been if he had succeeded in obtaining the favors of the mysterious woman he coveted:

N'espérant plus que l'amie vienne, désespéré de tout et se mourant d'amour, Tristan, sur la plage mytiquement [sic] vaste et au long de ses flots de chant et de rêve, sur la grève des rocs déserts, Tristan, et le moderne et contemporain Tristan de l'Isolde jamais obtenue, rassasié du besoin de vivre et seulement avide de la fin, de la fin qui serait néant... (339-340)

At first, the dream is nearly exegetic in nature, almost suspiciously explicative with its definition of what “the end” of Tristan’s life would entail. This impression is solidified by the subsequent description of his mock suicide, with his weapon of choice being the heady fragrance emanating from the flower maidens: “le moderne Tristan se coucherait parmi ces effluves excessifs [sic] pour qu’il y vive” (Idem) Cast as a coward, the Symbolist Tristan is too much of a hedonist to go through with his desire to annihilate himself; rather he only aims for a subtle taste of his own destruction—that is to say the letting go of his analytical mind through sex—to be enjoyed over and over. He is therefore a true manifestation of the Symbolist artist caught in an erotically enhanced vision of life induced by the Rimbaudian “dérèglement de tous les sens,” over which he enjoys full control. Or so he might think. The text is ambiguous enough that it opens up a space to conjure up the pathological side of such self-delusion.

Unlike his predecessors Baudelaire and Rimbaud, however, Dujardin himself did not believe in the virtues of opium or hashish in providing access to a mental state conducive to poetic activity—what Baudelaire considered to be: “cet état charmant et singulier, où toutes les forces s’équilibrent...” (*Œuvres complètes* I 347-8) In actuality, it seems as if Dujardin had found an alternative but similarly addictive path towards inspiration: the one of Wagnerian music drama that got him hooked back in 1882 and which he had to exorcise through his writing.

If the recasting of heroic Wagnerian tropes in the modest mental theatre of *Pour la vierge*

was proof enough that Dujardin resisted the concept of Wagnerian synthesis by proposing little ironic vignettes in its stead, the next part of my chapter shall devote some attention to Dujardin's reevaluation of the figure of the artist and the nature of his/her creative powers, another domain where he differentiated himself from Wagner. In so doing, I propose to consider Dujardin's actual experience of Wagnerian music by analyzing his mode of listening. Lest this approach may seem a bit unscientific, I contend that Dujardin's reviews of Wagnerian performances provide a great number of clues that can be used as evidence of his nuanced relationship to all things Wagnerian. Furthermore, I aim to detail how Dujardin's peculiar listening habits point to an alternative to the totalizing work of art, where the Symbolist author is free to stage his epistemological doubt while illuminating the potential for self-delusion lurking behind Wagner's grand metaphysical design.

The Artist as Truth-Teller: The Tiresias Model

Although Dujardin was one of the great instigators of the Symbolist movement through his dual activity as an experimental writer and Wagnerian exegete, his reputation among his contemporaries was largely based on his prowess as an editor, while his writings were mostly ignored as self-indulgent fluff, the product of a dandy too consumed with his appearance to write anything worthwhile.⁴⁶ If Dujardin was indeed one of the true innovators of the 1880s, he lacked the impulse to theorize his own accomplishments and consolidate them in his critical writing, a fact that helps elucidate the reason behind his eventual obscurity as the inventor of the interior monologue in the early twentieth century, before James Joyce's intervention in the 1920s. As a

⁴⁶ The reception of *Les Lauriers sont coupés* in the 1880s and 90s is quite revealing of Dujardin's contemporaries' dismissive attitude towards him as a writer. See for instance Rachilde's review on the occasion of the republication of the novel in 1897: "Le sourire bon, très bon, les yeux fatigués de voir fin, dans une pose d'attente correcte, trop correcte, le chapeau et les gants d'un soin délicat, quelque chose de soyeux et de moqueur se répandant sur toute la personne, tel se présente le Dujardin-Brummel d'Anquetin aux premières pages de ce livre, et telle aussi, la littérature de l'auteur, soucieuse étrangement d'être du monde et de la vie" (*Mercury de France* 92 (August 1897): 339-340).

matter of fact, the only literary articles he ever penned during his creative prime—the 1880s and 1890s—were dedicated to championing the unpublished work of his recently departed friend, Jules Laforgue, and had nothing to do with his own literary output.⁴⁷ It was only in the 1930s, due to a sense of urgency motivated by Joyce and Larbaud's positive reevaluation of his work, that he belatedly performed the task of documenting his contribution to Symbolism.⁴⁸

Considering the above chronology, the collection of miscellaneous short critical essays published under the title *De Stéphane Mallarmé au prophète Ezéchiel* (1919) stands as an oddity. If it has been little examined by critics, it is perhaps due to its dispersed nature, in spite of the fact that this thin volume contains some of Dujardin's most enlightening critical writing. This text is also the missing piece of the puzzle that helps bridge the gap between his Symbolist years and his scholarly career as a historian of religion, with a final chapter dedicated to the peculiar structure of biblical verse. Curiously, the Wagnerian reference is almost absent from the work, the poet being seemingly more attentive to the role played by his own personal experience in his creative endeavors over any external artistic or intellectual input:

on n'exprime bien que les choses qu'on a bien pensées. Toute pensée non pensée personnellement est une pensée approximative ; toute émotion qui n'a pas été ressentie personnellement reste une émotion approximative ; toute vision que notre œil n'a pas vue est une vision approximative. (...) Ainsi tombe le préjugé de l'opposition entre le fond et la forme. La forme n'existe pas indépendamment du fond ; indépendamment du fond, une belle forme est un trompe-l'œil (*De Stéphane Mallarmé au prophète Ezéchiel* 33).

To the union of form and content in the literary text corresponds another merging, that of artistic expression and personal engagement.⁴⁹ In light of this excerpt, which does its very best to counter

⁴⁷ Among Dujardin's writings devoted to Laforgue are the September 1887 article "Jules Laforgue" published in *La Revue indépendante*, an April 1888 introduction to a collection of unpublished Laforgue poems, *Des fleurs de bonne volonté*, also in the *Revue indépendante*, and an edition of Laforgue's *Derniers vers* (1890), in cooperation with Félix Fénéon, to which he also contributed the preface.

⁴⁸ Two of the main texts to have come out at that time were: "Le monologue intérieur: son apparition, ses origines, sa place dans l'œuvre de James Joyce" (1931) and the collection of essays, *Mallarmé par un des siens* (1936).

⁴⁹ Music may be seen as an implicit model here, as the one art form in which both content and form are inseparable. According to Hanslick, music has no subject to speak of, it cannot represent a character or concept. Its only content

the preconception—put forward by Gide and Rivière—that the Symbolists were too occupied with uncovering the true nature of their inner selves to bother exploring what life had to offer, it is possible to contemplate the possibility that Dujardin’s relationship to Wagner was primarily intellectual another such “*trompe-l’oeil*,” an incomplete story put forward by critics based on available textual evidence: translations, exegetical articles and the occasional reference in fiction. Rather conveniently, this narrative ignores Dujardin’s deeply personal relationship to the music of Wagner and obscures the fact that he was an avid concertgoer who frequently traveled in order to get his Wagnerian fix. There is, however, a trace of Dujardin’s regular listening activities in the form of a handful of Wagnerian reviews and a couple of passages in bigger articles dedicated to Wagner. Although they are merely clues, I would like to utilize relevant excerpts here in an attempt to reconstruct a more accurate picture, one that would strive not separate Dujardin’s texts, in other words, “*la forme*,” from his experience, or “*le fond*.”

The final article for the *Revue wagnérienne*, “*Considérations sur l’art wagnérien*” (1887), sees Dujardin take a hypothetical audience member from ancient Greece as proxy for his own model of consumption of Wagnerian music, one that would promote an active approach of engagement with the art instead of passivity and submissiveness. Of course, such a concept implies that there is a danger at hand for the artist who would frequent Wagner without critical distance, the nature of which was thoroughly analyzed by Nietzsche during the same year. If Wagnerian music drama were a real-life Medusa, turning its admirers into stone, Dujardin’s shield against its awe-inspiring character was a “hyper-specialization” of feeling. Such a strategy would prevent the mind from wandering off due to the overabundance of visual and auditory stimuli that would be impossible to recount orally or analyze on paper:

“besteht aus Tonreihen, Tonformen, diese haben keinen andern Inhalt als sich selbst” (96) / “consists of tonal sequences, tonal forms; these have no other content than themselves” (*On the Musically Beautiful* 78).

On peut imaginer que quelqu'un de ces jours anciens, (...) une fois ferma les yeux aux merveilles des décorations et des chorégraphies; et comme l'on dit, il ferma les yeux pour mieux entendre; en effet, aveugle aux tableaux du théâtre, il s'aperçut qu'il entendait mieux, qu'il comprenait mieux, qu'il se faisait plus fortes, plus profondes, plus belles, les sentences qui arrivaient à son oreille... et donnant à ces paroles toute l'attention de son esprit auparavant divisé aux visions et aux harmonies, médita qu'il jouissait plus intensément de ces littératures que seules il percevait; ainsi pouvait-il conclure que l'œuvre d'art serait plus puissante à l'émouvoir qui, au lieu d'occuper tous les moyens de perception, en occuperait un seul et, de ce fait, avec une triple intensité (*La Revue wagnérienne* 3 156).

Thus, closing one's eyes constitutes a small act of resistance and one that grants the practitioner a sense of power, as he or she chooses which bodily sense they are ready to expose to the effects of Wagnerian magic and which ones to conceal. Their reward will be an increased sense of localized pleasure, one of "triple intensity" even, all on their own terms.⁵⁰

Given the sub-optimal performance conditions in Paris at a time when Wagnerian music dramas were shown in Paris as one-act shows in concert versions, the question of agency for the listener is an especially significant one. As a critic, it is possible to wonder how much of the "eye-closing method" was developed as a means of coping with the lack of what is usually taken for granted at the opera house: elaborate sets, costumes, lighting and more or less competent acting. Using one's imagination, therefore, was critical; it represented a means of bridging the gap between the Wagnerian theory of totality and the reality of its incompleteness in Parisian concert halls, something that Dujardin seemed to point to in another *chronique* for the *Revue* devoted to a recent Lamoureux rendition of the first act of *Die Walküre*:

Aujourd'hui, nous avons le choix : — ou bien un théâtre, des décors, des acteurs : des demi trompe-l'oeil, l'apparence d'une forêt et les planches, ni convention pure, ni

⁵⁰ Uncritical hearing may cause a sense of vagueness that is symptomatic of the listener's lessening of his/her critical abilities, which was seen by many as a sign of regression. On this topic, see Max Nordau: "Die Verknüpfung, die Umsetzung, die Verwechselung der Gehörs- und Gesichtswahrnehmungen zu einem Kunst-Grundsatz erheben, in ihm Zukunft sehen wollen heißt die Umkehr vom Menschen - zum Austern-Bewußtsein als Fortschritt bezeichnen" (255) / "To raise the combination, transposition and confusion of the perceptions of sound and sight to the rank of a principle of art, to see futurity in this principle, is to designate as progress the return from the consciousness of man to that of the oyster" (142).

représentation artistique complète de la nature; et les acteurs, des hommes nécessairement difformes, incapables de faire admettre qu'ils sont les dieux qu'ils singent (...) — ou bien le concert, c'est-à-dire nulle prétention de représentation, mais le champ libre à la conception, l'espace grand ouvert à la réalité supérieure des forêts et des hôtes divins qu'en nous suscitera l'imagination : car cette musique c'est un décor, la nuit est dans la musique (...) et, les yeux fermés ou les yeux ouverts, pendant que chante la musique et que les paroles résonnent portées par des voix aussi absolument abstraites que les instruments de l'orchestre (...) spontanément, nous recréons votre action scénique, votre mimique, vos décors et tout le drame. (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 65-66)

In this excerpt, the work of recreation is more akin to reconstruction. With the help of the poetic imagination, Wagnerian theories are restored to their author's original demanding intentions. Inner vision thereby ensures that there will be no visual *trompe l'oeil*, in other words, no distraction for the musical work to fully take effect.

As it happens, Dujardin's activity as a reviewer suggests he was in the habit of closing his eyes while attending Wagnerian concerts at moments when he felt particularly moved. In "Considérations sur l'art wagnérien," he confesses to having done so in Bayreuth frequently as a technique with which to disregard the ugliness of bewilderingly prosaic stagings, and thus turn an imperfect execution into the optimal image he had in mind: "oui, les yeux clos à ces sottises, et solitaires en mon attention tout dévouée aux uniques sonorités qui d'un centre invisible dans l'absolue nuit de mes sens s'éparsemaient; ainsi, parfois, ai-je écouté, ai-je quéri, ai-je entendu la symphonie qui se nomme *Tristan et Isolde*" (170).⁵¹ Here the surprising presence of the verb "quérir" suggests an Orpheus/Eurydice relationship between a desiring poet and a more inaccessible kind of music lying below the melody—"la voix profonde des choses" as Dujardin would later call it—and one he had to search for in the darkness (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 39).

⁵¹ The Bayreuth Festspielhaus was an unusual example of immersive theater in the nineteenth century, where all lights were turned off during the performance, which forced spectators to focus on what went on on the stage. Owing to this "lights off" rule, closing one's eyes becomes doubly transgressive.

Only then could the music truly be “entendue” and processed internally, a trajectory to which Dujardin seems to allude with his inaccurate description of *Tristan und Isolde* as a “symphony.”

Furthermore, the act of closing one’s eyes and looking for the metaphysical resonance of music can also be understood to be a badge of distinction, differentiating true Wagnerites from casual concertgoers. This chosen audience would distinguish themselves through their willingness to overcome what Mallarmé had criticized in Wagner as his over-reliance on anecdote, a polysemic word that includes plot, the reliance on myth and visual/aural story-telling, which he saw as detrimental to the imagination.⁵² This was explained by Dujardin in a later article from 1893, “Les chagrins d’un vieux wagnérien”:

nous ne sommes pas des enfants qui demandent l’illusion de la réalité au théâtre ! Ça nous est égal que les chanteurs aient une façon de marcher et de gesticuler moins nature qu’Antoine. Nous admettons que Wotan sous les traits de M. Delmas, se livre à d’admirables effets de torse ; il est si simple de ne pas le regarder (*Le Figaro* May 18, 1893).

However, internal listening, it must be added, is not synonymous with critical listening. It still leaves room for sensual enjoyment and surprise. Such a mode of musical awareness, I believe, befits the activity of the poet in particular, as a preparatory tool that enables him/her to appropriate the performance before turning the experience into a highly subjective mode of writing.

Contrary to the overly cerebral reputation attached to the Symbolists by their critics, Dujardin’s purpose in making himself voluntarily blind may have had more to do with hedonistic reasons than shunning the contingent aspects of live performance. Although it may seem

⁵² See the opening sentences of *Richard Wagner: Rêverie d’un poète français*: “Voyez-le des jours abolis ne garder aucune anecdote énorme et fruste, comme par une prescience de ce qu’elle apporterait d’anachronisme dans une représentation théâtrale, Sacre d’un des actes de la Civilisation” (*Euvres Complètes* II 157). In *Mallarmé par un des siens*, Dujardin boiled down Mallarmé’s criticism of Wagner in three terms: “Trois choses surtout lui apparaissent être des erreurs fondamentales dans la théorie et l’œuvre de Wagner: l’anecdote, même si elle se hausse à la légende; le comédien qui avec sa personnalité frelatée lui semble être, non pas un intermédiaire entre la foule et le poète, mais un obstacle; enfin le décor matériel” (78).

paradoxical at first, this magnified aesthetic focus is likely derivative of Schopenhauer's theory of contemplation—one in which the onlooker achieves a sense of objectivity by losing himself/herself in the object at which he/she gazes—although the means to do so differ. Yet it is also redolent of a common trope concerning poets and their supposed mystical abilities, as this quote from Novalis would show:

Der Sinn für Poesie hat viel mit dem Sinn für Mystizismus gemein. (...) Er stellt das Unvorstellbare dar. Er sieht das Unsichtbare, fühlt das Unfühlbare etc. (...) Der Dichter ist wahrhaft sinnberaubt, dafür kommt alles in ihm vor. Er stellt im eigentlichsten Sinn (das) *Subjekt-Objekt* vor—*Gemüt und Welt* (Novalis Werke 561).

The poetic mind has much in common with the mystical mind. It represents the unrepresentable. It sees the invisible, perceives the imperceptible. (...) The poet is truly deprived of his senses, instead everything occurs within him. The poet is literally *subject and object* at the same time, *soul and universe* (*The Orphic Vision* 50, with my own amendments).⁵³

Here, the reasoning is clear: being able to intuit the world of ideas comes at an expensive price: being deprived of one's usual senses. It is the first step to open up the so-called mind's eye and give credence to the very sentence that Schopenhauer placed at the beginning of *World as Will and Representation*: "the world is my representation." In short, this retreat into interiority involves a rejection of the external world, but unlike the Cartesian *tabula rasa*, the twist is that such a gesture is made not for the sake of a sharpened intellect, but rather for a heightened sensuality.

It is important to stress that this Romantic *topos* of metaphorical blindness did not come out of a vacuum, rather, it was based upon a tradition from Greek Antiquity, the most famous example of which being the bard Demodocus in book 8 of Homer's *Odyssey*, described as a "faithful bard the Muse adored above all others, true, but her gifts were mixed with good and evil

⁵³ Novalis's works gained popularity in Symbolist circles thanks to Maeterlinck who penned an influential piece in *la Nouvelle Revue*, which came out in two installments in December 1894. A year later, he released his translation of *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* and other poems.

both: she stripped him of sight but gave the man the power of stirring, rapturous song” (193). As we can see, the poet is concurrently blessed *and* disabled, thus embodying an oxymoron of sorts, similar to Brünnhilde’s ardent chastity, or Rimbaud’s visionary, lucid and inebriated all at once. The reputation of Homer’s character was such that his blindness became characteristic of the author himself in popular imagination, although there is no proof that he was in fact visually impaired. Yet the myth proved to be so powerful as to become an archetype and Homer spawned a lineage of mad geniuses, all of whom were set to overcome physical adversity through their artistic prowess.

One of the most illustrious examples of that tradition in the nineteenth century was the role Wagner attributed to deafness in Beethoven’s career, as K.M. Knittel has shown:

In his 1870 *Beethoven* essay, Richard Wagner made a radical and unprecedented departure from the perspective of early critics: he proposed for the first time that Beethoven's late works were in fact his greatest and that his loss of hearing was beneficial, even vital, to the creative process. In so doing he made possible the elevation of the late works to the status of genius. (“The Reception of Beethoven's Late Style” 51)

This unconventional interpretation of Beethoven’s trajectory was one to which Wagner held on during most of his life and a constant source of comfort during his own trials. Beethoven even became a muse of sorts in Wagner’s essays with two of his major texts taking him as their subject; the first one being the short story *Une visite à Beethoven* (1840)—which I mentioned in chapter 1—while the second is a convoluted essay simply titled *Beethoven* (1870), the publication of which coincided with the Franco-Prussian war. Beyond its exalted patriotic undertones, it was perhaps Wagner’s most sophisticated text when it came to articulating his metaphysics and his vision of the role of the artist within his new Schopenhauerian worldview.

One particular excerpt from the latter text was to have a great impact on both Wyzewa and Dujardin. It portrays Beethoven as an artist whose inner life had been enhanced due to his real-life

disability, which consequence, Wyzewa believed, was to force him to fish for new material from the depths of his subconscious instead of relying on outside sources. Thus, Beethoven was a living example of Wyzewa's evocative rallying cry for his Symbolist colleagues, which made its début in the article "Le Pessimisme de Richard Wagner": "Seul vit le moi, et seule est sa tâche éternelle : créer" (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 169). This notion of compensatory creative inwardness spoke to the pessimistic generation of the 1880s, which felt—as Dujardin himself claimed in a letter to the Italian journalist Vittorio Pica—that all topics had been exhausted: "Ah ! (...) Qu'il est donc vrai que tout a été dit et qu'il n'y a plus que les points de vue qui changent !" (cited in Weissman 492) In short, literature was facing an impasse and was in dire need of renewal.

As a matter of fact, Dujardin was so struck by this image that he brought up the same passage from Wagner's *Beethoven*—in a translation by Wyzewa—twice in his career: the first time in the 1886 article, "Richard Wagner et la poésie française contemporaine" while the next was in 1897 for a short piece entitled "Les derniers quatuors de Beethoven," in the wake of his official (but temporary) renouncement of the Wagnerian cause:

(...) Un musicien privé de l'ouïe ! Peut-on concevoir un peintre aveugle ? Mais on peut concevoir et on connaît le Voyant aveugle. Tirésias avait vu se fermer devant lui le monde de l'Apparence : et il avait pu ainsi contempler avec ses yeux intérieurs le fond même de toutes les Apparences. A lui est pareil ce musicien devenu sourd. Le bruissement de la vie ne peut plus désormais le troubler. Il est tout à écouter les harmonies de son être intérieur ; il habite à jamais ce monde profond : c'est de là qu'il parle au monde externe, à ce monde qui n'a plus rien à lui dire. Ainsi, le génie du Maître est, enfin, délivré de tout Non-Moi, et vit maintenant en soi et pour soi⁵⁴ (*La Revue blanche* XII 123).

Hiding behind the Beethovenian monument stands a figure as mythical as the one of the heroic artist: it is the Greek prophet Tiresias, made blind by the Gods in exchange for his powers of divination. Despite living in perpetual obscurity, Tiresias is self-sufficient; he remains in a state of

⁵⁴ For the original, see Roger Allen's bilingual edition of *Beethoven*, 108-109.

self-induced contemplation, which enables him to feel the essence of all things at all times. He indeed lives “en soi et pour soi.”

As the reader might recall, in my analysis of *Pour la vierge*, I went over a similar prepositional dichotomy between “pour soi” and “de soi” and developed the idea that they could potentially be understood as a warning for Symbolist literature not to take its objective of accurately mirroring the writer’s inner life too seriously. In the case of Tiresias, “en soi” / “pour soi” do add traction to the idea that the artistic self is in fact fully autonomous and can supply itself with its inner visions, as Beethoven supposedly did: “Il y a eu un jour, dans l’humanité, un musicien (des plus prodigieusement doués, d’ailleurs) qui, étant devenu sourd, a pu entendre directement les harmonies du monde intérieur; il y a eu dans l’humanité un homme qui a pu voir face à face son rêve” (Idem). But this joyful impression of self-sufficiency through omniscience is revealed to be a mere illusion when confronted with the matters of love, a process Dujardin explored time and time again in his writing.

In this connection, I now propose to devote some attention to another poem, *À la gloire d’Antonia*, which I believe to be key in questioning the true extent of the poet’s imaginative powers. This prose piece in eight sections was published in the decadent journal *La Vogue* in 1886 and dedicated to the co-founder of the *Revue*, Houston Stewart Chamberlain.⁵⁵ If we are to believe its author, *À la gloire* is mainly a transitional text within Dujardin’s corpus and one for which he later expressed regret because he still lacked the technical mastery necessary to write it exclusively in free verse, unlike what he later accomplished in *Pour la vierge*.⁵⁶ However, I am of the opinion

⁵⁵ Chamberlain met Dujardin in the early 1880s in Bayreuth and engaged in a lifelong correspondence with him. Both men entertained the idea of a collaboration on a new more literal French translation of the entire *Ring* cycle, which never came to fruition. Chamberlain thought highly of his friend and believed he possessed the talent to incarnate the Wagnerian spirit in the French language: “Vous possédez à un rare degré l’instinct de la pensée wagnérienne” (*Rencontres avec Houston Stewart Chamberlain* 26).

⁵⁶ Here is Dujardin’s description of the poem and the creative process behind it: “*À la gloire d’Antonia*, (...) devait comprendre un ensemble de parties en prose et de parties en vers, – le même cadre que j’allais employer deux ans plus

that *À la gloire*, if less formally adventurous than Dujardin's next poetic attempts, does have merit of its own. Admittedly, it dares to emphasize the extraordinary nature of the artist's visionary abilities while exposing the limits of such gifts. Its gentle downward trajectory is one in which the reader witnesses the narrator slowly evolving towards inextricable self-delusion.

À la gloire stages the possibility for the poet to be vanquished by an illusion that is too efficient in its imitation of life, much like Wagnerian music drama can be for listeners unable to see behind the veil of its "phantasmagoria."⁵⁷ Once the poet has gotten to know this fictional universe and has been overcome by its oceanic sensual and emotional self-evidence, there is a high probability that he will seek refuge in this enhanced reality over and over again, in a manner emulating the poetic usage of stimulants in Rimbaud's *Lettre du voyant*, or Baudelaire's *Les Paradis artificiels*.

This particular form of danger is coincidentally exactly the premise of the short story, "Le kabbaliste," part of the 1886 collection *Les Hantises*. Its central thesis seems to anticipate *À la gloire*, as it features a protagonist similarly consumed by his inner life who is also capable of self-absorbing hallucinations. Such is their power that he has foregone any desire to attend the theatre any more because he is able to satiate the same need by replaying fragments from shows he did attend previously in his head, like a magic lantern of sorts. This ability is best exemplified through this virtuosic reenactment of the ending of *Die Walküre*:

Oh Brünnhilde, ma forte, dors couchée en les ruissellements du rouge sonore, dors en la très haute paix des divins embrasements, sommeille, câline, sommeille, bonne...

tard pour la *Vierge du roc ardent* et plus tard encore pour la *Réponse de la bergère au berger*. Les parties en vers de ces deux derniers poèmes devaient être et ne pouvaient être que des vers libres ; mais à l'époque où j'écrivais *À la gloire d'Antonia*, je n'en étais pas à cette décision, et pendant les trois premiers mois de l'année 1886, je tâtonnais, hésitant entre la forme du vers régulier plus ou moins libéré et une formule de vers libre dont la nécessité s'imposait à mon esprit" (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 174).

⁵⁷ Originally, the term "phantasmagoria" was coined to designate theatrical performances relying on optical illusions, such as magic lanterns. In Adorno's *In Search of Wagner*, "phantasmagoria" is the chief means of enforcing a theatrical illusion. It designates the impression made by Wagnerian opera as seemingly "self-producing" itself a "magic delusion" where the work of art denies its artificiality and its commercial leanings (74-85).

Brünnhilde, espère : un Héros viendra, le réveilleur, vainqueur des Dieux, superbe et roi... Sur le roc transfulguré, parmi la jubilante flamme : je te sens et je te pense et dans les majestueux gais épanouissements du feu, avec toi je rêve aux Crépuscules futurs, ô dormeuse des divinités passées... (205)

Although the figure of Brünnhilde is rich in agency in the *Ring* cycle, both of her appearances in Dujardin's texts, first in "Le kabbaliste" then in *Pour la vierge du roc ardent*, portray her as a captive awaiting her liberation. Plunged into a deep slumber after losing her immortality, she is shown supine, surrounded by a protective wall of fire preventing anyone but the mightiest of heroes from taking possession of her.

Dujardin's repeated appeal to this particular incarnation of Brünnhilde may not be so innocent. In essence, I see it as representative of his efforts to subtly reappropriate Wagnerian themes in his own works. For one, such imagery can be interpreted allegorically, as the sign of an implicit power struggle between master and disciple with Wagnerian drama being symbolized by the sleeping former goddess, while Dujardin would identify himself with the ruling figure of Wotan, responsible for Brünnhilde's punishment. It should also be noted that the choice of Wotan may symbolize yet another variation of the Tiresias story, as the King of the Gods willingly sacrificed one of his eyes in the pursuit of absolute knowledge, an act that effectively begins the process leading to the destruction of the Gods.

In the 1886 article "Richard Wagner et la poésie française contemporaine," Dujardin made clear the special significance of the character of Wotan for him by proposing a fairly idiosyncratic take on the *Ring* cycle, one in which he cast the drama occurring on the stage as a distraction from Wagner's real solipsistic purposes. What truly mattered in the plot, he argued, took place within Wotan's consciousness: "Telle, semble vivre une âme, en ces drames, tandis que d'autres, au tour d'elle, vivent" (*La Revue de Genève* XI 260). Such an understanding of the character is likely rooted in Wotan's monologue in Act 2 scene 2 of *Die Walküre*, in which he addresses his daughter

Brünnhilde not as a separate entity, but as the incarnation of his own Will. Thus the dialogue is quickly recast as a soliloquy in which Wotan confesses his agonizing solitude and the one true taste of impossibility he has encountered as an omnipotent being: “Was keinem in Worten ich künde, unausgesprochen bleib’ es den ewig: mit mir nur rat’ ich, red’ ich zu dir.” / “What I tell no one in words, let it be for ever unspoken: I only talk to myself, if I speak to you” (*The Ring of the Nibelung* 221). The issue is one of empathy, as he is in fact unable to engage in meaningful dialogue with others who are less free than he is.

As if to cement the lasting impression made by this specific scene on Dujardin, the ghost of Wotan briefly reappears in the final story from *Les Hantises*, “L’enfer,” in which an unnamed protagonist engages in a philosophical conversation with a wise doctor who pleads with him to emulate Wotan’s example: “comme le Wotan, père de Walhall, songez, tout fort que vous êtes, dans l’angoisse et dans le tremblement” (*Les Hantises* 242). Just like the aforementioned scene from *Walküre*, the dialogue may just as well be a monologue, one in which the injunction “songez tout fort” opens up a cathartic space where all different parts of the self may get a chance to express their specific viewpoint, and thus hopefully achieve some kind of resolution.

My contention is that Dujardin derived this Wotan-centric understanding of *Die Walküre* from Chamberlain, whose musings on Wagner he took almost religiously.⁵⁸ Accordingly, in a letter

⁵⁸ Carl Dahlhaus also understands *Die Walküre* from a Wotan-centric perspective: “*Die Walküre* ist zwar—und damit ist der Gesichtspunkt bezeichnet, unter dem das Werk als Einheit erscheinen soll—ein Wotan-Drama, aber ein Drama, das insofern keines ist, als es sich gleichsam in einen einzigen Augenblick zusammengezogen hat: in den Moment, in dem Wotan zum Bewußtsein des unaufhebbaren Zwiespalts kommt, in den er geraten ist. Die Wotan-Handlung ist (...) ein Mono- oder Psychodram, um es pointiert auszudrücken: Brünnhilde und Fricka verblassen beinahe zu Allegorien, in denen die entgegengesetzten Regungen, die in Wotan im Widerstreit miteinander liegen, Gestalt geworden sind. Its Brünnhilde Wotans Wille (...) so ist Fricka Wotans Gewissen...” (*Richard Wagners Musikdramen* 118). / “*Die Walküre* is Wotan’s drama—that is the only viewpoint from which the work can take on the appearance of unity—yet not a drama at all, insofar as essentially it contracts into a single moment, that at which Wotan recognizes that there is no solution to his dilemma. The Wotan action in *Die Walküre* is a monodrama or a psychodrama (...) Brünnhilde, and Fricka almost fade to allegorical figures representing the two different forces at war in Wotan. If Brünnhilde is his will (...) Fricka is his conscience...” (*Wagner’s Music Dramas* 120).

dated November 11, 1885, Chamberlain pushed forward the notion that another music drama, *Parsifal*, was misunderstood by many because it was a “drame purement psychologique—si jamais il en fut un” featuring abstract characters: “les personnages des emblèmes qui se meuvent devant nous, pour faire sentir et saisir—en cherchant—une signification profonde et autre que celle de l’action extérieure, fortuite...” (HRC Folder 29.2). Like Chamberlain, Dujardin understood *Parsifal* to be the apex of Wagner’s subjective turn, a point he made clear in “Richard Wagner et la poésie contemporaine”:

Car Amfortas, c’est Parsifal visionnaire d’une vie concupiscente; Klingsor, c’est encore la vision, en Parsifal, d’une vie autrement vécue; et Kundry, les Filles, ce n’est rien que des visions de Parsifal; les chevaliers, toutes ces ombres, les images de sa voyance: vie de l’âme religieuse et charnelle, Parsifal, c’est nos désirs, nos vœux, nos regrets, nos vœux éteints, l’homme REEL; et, par le tout divin langage des musiques (à notre faiblesse facilité par le symbole des gestes et des mots), c’est, vécue, la vie qu’il faut vivre, – expliquée, l’explication, – une formule inventée au très vieil idéal (*La Revue de Genève* XI 262-3).

In this paragraph, “vie” and “vision” almost become synonymous, a phenomenon that is perhaps the main point of “Le kabbaliste,” *À la gloire*, and the variation on *Tristan* featured in the last prose section of *Pour la vierge*.

However, *À la gloire* is the more fully realized text when it comes to staging a solitary dream through and through and making any more pretense to engage with realism preposterous, as Kathleen McKilligan has noticed: “It is as if we are seeing the action on a screen in the narrator’s mind, where every irrelevant detail has been filtered out, leaving only the essence of his sensations” (42). Inasmuch as it engages with a thorough exploration of subjectivity, *À la gloire* seems to be a preparatory sketch for what came later with Dujardin’s invention of the interior monologue in *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, showing the reader “la vie qu’il faut vivre” in the form of an imagined romance, where the self serenades itself.

In a movement reminiscent of the story of Tiresias, the introduction stages the poet's rejection of the phenomenal world, a gesture needed to purify his inner vision. Much like a God, he is able to will a female companion into being, an opening that is strikingly similar to the first section of *Pour la vierge* in which the narrator invokes the specter of Brünnhilde through the power of his mind without having to say her name.⁵⁹ Likewise, *À la gloire*'s protagonist performs the same mental operation with the help of a secret mantra, the silenced name "Antonia":

Glorieusement, je vous ai connue ; hors les apparences, hors toute relation et hors la vanité, non par un charme sensuel, une quelconque occurrence, non suivant la loi d'un vouloir étranger, mais tout idéalement, par la minime suscitation d'un nom. (...) Ainsi je vous connus ; ayant ouï votre nom, oh féminin, je vous songeai (1).

Within this demiurgic act, there is already an element of deception at play with the poet declaring that this new lifelike existence possesses a consciousness of her own, deserving of respect as the formal "je vous ai connue" would suggest. In effect, this hypothetical "vous" is not a true Other; she is merely a part of his self that is habitually confined to his unconscious mind. It is thus tempting to envisage this Antonia as a Jungian anima, representing the feminine inner personality of the poet. And true to the delusions of grandeur already apparent in the introduction, this personification of his anima takes on the guise of nothing less than female perfection.

However, when she manifests herself in the second section of the poem, the invoked spirit is far from an abstraction. Indeed, she takes on the form of a chaste woman with light-colored eyes and raven hair framing her pale face: "une existence virginale; entre la ligne blanche du cou et la ligne noire de la ceinture" (2). She is an oxymoron incarnate made of both light and darkness who bears a name of Latin origin full of feminine-sounding vowels: Antonia.⁶⁰ Such a felicitous

⁵⁹ "Entrée au rêve ; la pensée, le désir, l'illusion. Vierge ! ainsi tout à coup, par cette nuit d'ennui, je pense ta virginité ardent au long des rocs ardu ; et sévit le désir de toi, et l'esprit, te méditant, t'atteint" (*La Revue indépendante* 23 323).

⁶⁰ Antonia's narrative function is ambiguous as she is both a benevolent presence and a temptation for the poet to relinquish reality completely. Perhaps *La Légende d'Antonia*, features the best example of this "oxymoronic

phonetic arrangement underpins her special status: indeed, it quickly becomes clear to the reader of the poem that this woman whose magical name is only written once in the beginning before it is silenced for the remainder of the poem stands not for a lone individual, but rather for the Eternal Feminine. This particular metonymy helps explain why the concept of “Antonia” was in fact a recurring one throughout Dujardin’s corpus, making appearances in this poem, but also in *Les Lauriers* and of course in the dramatic trilogy, *La Légende d’Antonia*.

Yet again, as is the case with a number of Dujardin’s fictional characters, Antonia is in fact the fictional double of a real-life person. In a letter sent to his then mistress, the dancer Jane Avril, in 1892, Dujardin was adamant that he could not entertain profound romantic feelings for any woman, as he had already experienced such feelings for “Antonia,” whom he somewhat tritely regarded as his one true love:

Vous savez peut-être vaguement qu’il y a maintenant sept ans j’ai aimé une jeune fille, la pauvre Antonia, que je devais épouser. Et depuis j’ai bien cru (?) que c’était fini et qu’à travers toutes les insignifiantes histoires de femmes de la vie, je n’aimerai jamais plus. Jamais plus que celle-là (Folder 15.3 November 4, 1892, HRC).

In a recent article, Kelly Maynard has since been able to prove that this alias stands in fact for Tony Riedel, the daughter of the Leipzig-based composer, Carl Riedel. Having met her and her family through Chamberlain in early 1885, Dujardin had subsequently engaged in a passionate but demure epistolary affair with the young Tony, before proposing marriage to her in late 1885. Her

character”: she is both a virgin and a sinner, a dark-haired woman and a dashing blond courtesan, she loves her chosen partner yet also lusts after a handsome shepherd... As such, she shares a fundamental trait with the greatest Wagnerian characters—not just with Kundry from *Parsifal*, as the epigraph to the first play would suggest through a direct quote from the second act: “Ich sah ihn und lachte,” her painful recollection of having laughed at Christ on the cross—all of whom are ambiguous to some degree, as noted by Adorno: “Ihr entspricht freilich ein zweideutiges Moment in der Ideologie, von der allbekannten Ambivalenz zwischen Sexualität und Askese bis zur Rolle zweideutiger Figuren, Hagens, des ‘Recken’ und Verräters, Kundrys, der Büsserin und Verführerin, selbst der Helden Tristan und Siegfried als der treulos Treuen” (*Versuch über Wagner* 50). / “Of course, there is also an ideological ambiguity to match it [the ambiguity of musical meaning], ranging from his well-known ambivalence between sexuality and asceticism to the role of ambiguous figures such as Hagen, who is both ‘warrior’ and traitor, Kundry, who is both penitent and seductress, and even heroes like Tristan and Siegfried, the faithless faithful” (*In Search of Wagner* 33).

father, fearful for his daughter's financial well-being, forbade the union ("The Ill-Equipped Modernist" 52). This never consummated love was the stuff of novels: untainted by reality, it came to epitomize aspirations towards romantic and, by extension, formal perfection. And it is as such that she is invoked by the poet of *À la gloire*, a text written in 1886, in the immediate aftermath of Dujardin's doomed romance, which happened to also be dedicated to Chamberlain, the man who introduced him to Tony.

The rest of the poem outlines the fine demarcation between creative lucidity and solipsistic madness. As Steven Huebner has conjectured, this very conflict is almost certainly autobiographical, a quality that imbues the poem with an endearing sense of vulnerability despite some of its clumsier self-satisfied passages (68). Repeatedly, the text flirts with the possibility that the poet will succumb to his own all-too-compelling illusion. It begins innocuously enough with the assertion in section 3 that this imagined woman is more than a masturbatory aid, although the poetic-I acknowledges having indulged in the past in: "le dormir dans l'insexualisation; vaines, vaines, vaines souvenirs" (3). At this early point, he is still tentative as to whether or not she is a fortuitous product of his imagination, his doubts being made palpable through the use of the conditional: "un soir d'intime fête, alors de nos vingt ans, nous irions; nous irions donc, oh mon amante" (Idem). Questioning her recurring status, he is unsure of his ability to control her and turn her into a ready-made illusion, available when needed.

This is still the case in section 4, where the osmosis between lovers casts the male poet against type as a passive figure: "et silencieuse en face du silencieux, (...) je sentais l'âme pénétrer en mon âme..." (5). Significantly, their union is accompanied by an ideal—read, silent—orchestra espousing their every thought: "et l'un près de l'autre nous serions, rêvant communiment [sic] dans les charmes d'orchestres derrière nous chantant," prompting a likely intertextual parallel with

Tristan. (3) But in *À la gloire*, fusion does not happen. Instead, it becomes clear that Tristan has turned into Narcissus, a character whose self-induced demise fascinated the Symbolists, like Remy de Gourmont in “Dernière conséquence de l'idéalisme”: “La pensée d'autrui est le miroir même de Narcisse, et sans lequel il serait ignoré éternellement. Il s'aime, parce qu'il s'est vu : on se voit dans un miroir, dans des yeux, dans le lac de la pensée extérieure” (*Mercur de France* X (March 1894): 200). If at first the poem was presented as a benign fantasy to the reader, its progression towards the occultation of all things real for the benefit of the deforming mirror of the imagination causes a slight sense of alarm.

Perhaps *À la gloire* is in fact a cautionary tale, warning those who have fallen for the Romantic dream of perfect fusion between the sexes/various parts of the self that such a notion is incompatible with real life experience. The text may thus stand as a potential critique of the Wagnerian ideal of perfect heterosexual couplings, epitomized by the union of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and the full recognition of the self in a sisterly/brotherly soul: “Im Bach erblickt' ich mein eigen Bild, und jetzt gewahr' ich es wieder: wie einst dem Teich es enttaucht, bietest mein Bild mir nun du! (*Die Walküre* Act 1, scene 3) / “I once caught sight of my own likeness in a brook, and now I see it again; then it rose up from the water, now my likeness comes from you!” (*The Ring of the Nibelung* 191). If incest is indeed what the self accomplishes by staging a romance with itself, *À la gloire* is certainly not as heavy-handed as Catulle Mendès's *Zo'har* (1886) or Élémer Bourges's *Le Crépuscule des dieux* (1884) in its handling of incestuous pairings and the disastrous consequences associated with them, yet it does approach the Wagnerian romantic paradigm of heterosexual osmosis with some hesitation.

What is rather concerning in this poem is the misguided sense of hubris beneath the veneer of the poet's triumphalism: “et je la recréais, et, aveugle, je la figurais à moi, immortelle, je me la

figurais, immortelle selon l'idée..." (4). The mention of blindness in this passage is seemingly redolent of Tiresias's story, an acknowledgment of the mystical powers necessary for the conjuring, which happens through the mind's eye. Since the woman has proven to be under the narrator's spell because she has in fact decided to return, thus proving that her apparition was no mere stroke of luck, the poet gains in confidence. In section 5, he dares to go further with this lifelike creature by giving her the gift of speech. She is thus able to recount her past in addition to articulating her impressions and needs.

I interpret this particular point of the poem as a variation on the theme of (mis-)communication between lovers, a problem that was already highlighted by Villiers in the short story "L'inconnue" where an impending love affair—ignited by a grandiose farewell performance from the diva Maria Malibran in Bellini's *Norma*—is prevented by the woman's reluctance to effectively chase away her self-doubt and engage in an actual conversation with the man wooing her. Although section 5 features the first actual conversation in the prose poem, it is only a sophisticated ruse that serves to hide its monologic nature. Strangely enough, the amorous script of *À la gloire* is also prompted by a musical performance: "écoutez cette musique; quelle, cette mélodie ? je retrouve un air de Pergolèse, un chant de clavecin grêle" (6). The innocuous harpsichord playing a charming Pergolesi aria is not only dated, it is incongruous. Through this unlikely musical intervention, the lovers' interaction is put into question: did it really happen? Or are we faced with a narcissistic love scene in which the ego is serenading itself?

This pseudo-love scene, I would like to argue, foreshadows the various wooden conversations peppering *Les Lauriers*, the vacuity of which is yet another means of underpinning a particular brand of fin-de-siècle pessimism concerning the possibility for two subjectivities to interact with one another on a level below the superficial. According to Julia Przyboś, the end

result is somewhat paradoxical: although conversations abound in most of Dujardin's texts, they are wont to highlight their solipsistic nature. The end result is the same as in *À rebours*, the novel of enclosure *par excellence*: "Huysmans élimine les occasions de communiquer, Dujardin s'emploie au contraire à les multiplier. (...) Certes, *Les Lauriers* abondent en conversation. Toutes ces conversations ne sont pourtant que des dialogues de sourds" ("Décadence et modernisme" 139). Yet far from believing themselves to be in an unenviable situation, Dujardin's protagonists seem to revel in their non-discussions with non-existent entities created by their imagination. Possessing the knowledge of their unreality while still engaging with them as if they were autonomous human beings means that both poet and poetic invention are embodied oxymorons, "des corps aveuglés et voyants" (6). In this manner, they bear a resemblance to Wotan who is at once aware of the God's demise and blind to his own faults, similarly engaging in mock dialogues that are in fact soliloquies.

While Dujardin's protagonists are able to periodically show great lucidity concerning the true nature of their various romantic entanglements, they nevertheless enjoy being in a state of voluntary delusion that stimulates their imagination. The fictional relationship portrayed in *À la gloire* thus stands as a metaphor for voluntary blindness while also being reminiscent of Dujardin's view that late Wagnerian music dramas were in fact long monologues in the form of apparent conversations. Arguably, *Les Lauriers* represents a more thorough attempt at crafting a work of fiction following that same principle, with a central character who has made himself blind to people's true intentions towards him while remaining painfully self-aware, a dichotomy exposed through the device of the interior monologue. In effect, this contradiction relies on a sense of theatricality—a genre in which a greater level of interaction is the norm—that nevertheless

deceives the reader's expectations through a constant emphasis on the main character's isolation.⁶¹ Much like Wotan who laments his inability to speak to anyone but variations of his own self: "Zum Ekel find' ich ewig nur mich in allem, was ich erwirke! (*Die Walküre* Act 2, scene 2) / To my disgust I find in everything I do only an eternal reflection of myself" (*The Ring of the Nibelung* 229), Daniel Prince blocks out his interlocutors' voices in order to enhance his own interiority. Compensating for a perceived lack in communication in contemporary urban life as well as poor amorous prospects resulting from changing sexual mores, his interior monologue reveals itself to be a dramatic tool capable of fabricating an alternative reality in which these problems are remedied and repressed sexual desire is fulfilled. As such, it is the ultimate form of voluntary blindness used for creative purposes.

The Subjective Screen of Desire

At first glance, it seems as if Dujardin only found the courage to engage with the dramatic form after the years of the *Revue wagnérienne*, through the *Légende d'Antonia* trilogy (1891-1893).⁶² Perhaps the most ambitious project of his literary career, this trilogy of plays centering on a single female character's evolution made his totalizing aspirations most obvious. In truth, the very last play, *La Fin d'Antonia* may have seemed like a culmination of sorts for its author as it was the only work he ever explicitly dedicated to Richard Wagner. However, much like Dujardin's other writings, the plot feels like an afterthought, focusing instead on the scrupulous investigation of the tribulations of its main character's—the eponymous Antonia's—romantic life. If previous

⁶¹ For a definition of the signs denoting theatricality outside of the realm of the theater, see Barthes: "Qu'est-ce que la théâtralité ? C'est le théâtre moins le texte, une épaisseur de signes et de sensations qui s'édifient sur la scène à partir de l'argument écrit, c'est cette sorte de perception œcuménique des artifices sensuels, gestes, tons, distances, substances, lumières, qui submerge le texte sous la plénitude de son langage extérieur" (*Essais critiques* 45).

⁶² The manuscript of *Thusnelda* nuances this narrative. However, the document remains undated, which makes it difficult to determine whether or not it was written during Dujardin's "Wagnerian years."

episodes had detailed her moral shortcomings, the final chapter of her theatrical life is dedicated to her newfound spiritual enlightenment, which becomes accessible to her via maternity. The very last scene sees her taking on her new role as a mother with unsubtle hints that she is in fact standing in as a reincarnation of the Virgin Mary. Needless to say, the play is ripe with the type of kitschy Christian-inspired imagery at which even Wagner, the author of a libretto recounting the life of Jesus, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1848), would have blushed.

The premiere of this third play was an extravagant affair that has since become infamous because it did not prevent its resounding failure with the public. To my knowledge, it has not been restaged since 1893, but has outlived its poorly received run by the grace of a review by Mallarmé for the *National Observer*, later reworked into the poetic essay, “Planches et feuillets.” In this text, the older poet depicts Dujardin, his faithful disciple and occasional editor, in evocative terms: “Je le veux voir, pour cette heure, costumé du soir, une pluie d’orchidées au revers de l’habit—ombre de trois quarts selon la rampe éteinte, avec une jolie inclinaison de toute l’attitude—mystérieux, scrutant du monocle le manuscrit de son prologue; whistlérien” (*Œuvres complètes* II 192). While the picture of the playwright surveying his own prologue before the show is rather evident, the adjective “whistlerian” is certainly more puzzling. The word is ambiguous, perhaps referring to a potential physical likeness between Dujardin—who was short-sighted and known for wearing a monocle, as evidenced by a poster by Toulouse Lautrec from 1895 where the bespectacled blonde dandy is seated next to Jane Avril—and Whistler himself—whose own monocle was a perpetual feature in Walter Greaves’s portraits of the artist. Or “whistlerian” might just be a reference to some elusive quality unique to the painter. Knowing Whistler’s propensity to give musical titles—nocturnes and symphonies, for instance—to some of his paintings, and Dujardin’s aspirations towards artistic synthesis, the comparison does not seem to be a reach.

Written exclusively in free verse, *La Légende d'Antonia* trilogy certainly makes strategic use of pauses, as well as syllabic and rhythmic repetitions, all of which are loose “musical” qualities that made Mallarmé speak of a new genre in his assessment of the play: “un opéra sans accompagnement ni chant, mais parlé” (*Œuvres complètes* II 195), an impossibility in and of itself, or “pur objet paradoxal” to reprise Lacoue-Labarthe’s expression (148). This prompts the question: was the operatic dimension detected by Mallarmé even part of the text or was it a projection made in light of Dujardin’s Wagnerian sympathies?⁶³ And with it comes a follow-up issue: does a text need to possess a theatrical dimension in order to be considered Wagnerian?

Based on the Mallarmé review—in which the playwright was depicted reading his own prologue—we can infer that the young poet featured in the prologue of *La Fin d'Antonia* may be yet another fictional double for Dujardin. Far from the grandiose image promoted by Wagner with regard to his person and his artistry, this humble young man is a decidedly impersonal figure: “La gloire/N’est pas la stérile victoire/De marquer son nom sur les pages de quelque histoire./Mais sentir ce frémissement/Que pendant un instant/L’humanité/Au fond des cœurs a remué...” (182). On that account, the writer becomes a collective creation brought about by various individuals gathered together and willing to contemplate their reflection in a theatrical work that is neutral enough to welcome the process of identification.

Authorial self-effacement is thus the necessary condition for this communal self-examination to take place: “O foule, le poème/C’est votre idée qui surgit de vous-même;/C’est votre conscience/Qui désespérément aspire à l’existence/C’est l’envol/De l’âme au delà de

⁶³ This review by Tillet for *La Revue politique et littéraire: Revue bleue* is quite representative of the critical consensus at the time with reviewers expecting a French Wagnerian music drama from Dujardin only to be met with a paradoxical “spoken opera” that they felt would be better served with music: “La représentation continua tant bien que mal: c’était tout pareil à *Antonia*; la même philosophie servie par le même style: un effort appliqué et malheureux ‘visiblement inspiré de Wagner’, mais sans musique. L’entr’acte fut tumultueux. Quoi ! c’était le même Dujardin, l’apôtre hirsute et frénétique du wagnérisme ?” (*Revue bleue* LI (June 24, 1893): 797).

l'apparence par le symbole" (Idem) Here poetry and theater are emancipated from the shackles of traditional representation in order to become a mental experience, one reminiscent of what Blanchot believed Rimbaud demanded from poetry: "faire de la littérature une expérience qui intéresse le tout de la vie et le tout de l'être" (*La Part du feu* 159). It is in this emphasis on theater's evocative powers that *La Fin d'Antonia* can truly be considered to be a Symbolist play, in the same vein as Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893).

In truth, this idea of the work of art as a gateway towards an ontological window where the self is free to contemplate a level of truth inaccessible to it in the everyday world with the aid of one's imagination is derivative of Schopenhauer. Wagnerian music drama's *tour de force* was to consolidate this idea and ground it in "mythical" time through the continuity of melody and the refusal to break up his dramas into isolated numbers. In turn, this anchoring in dramatic time blurs the lines between scenic, vocal and orchestral narratives, all of which are unified into a musical current of sorts made of its own musical duration away from real time. Subsequently, the teleological actions of Wagner's protagonists bear less relevance than they do in traditional opera. What is valued instead is the spectator's progressive dramatic and musical encounter with human experiences, or *rein menschlich* emotions such as love/hate, greed/kindness, etc. The overall effect of such an emotional journey is that the public is theoretically compelled, even coerced, into facing their innermost desires and fears by witnessing their projection on the "dramatic screen," the stage on which archetypal characters are giving voice to such feelings. And they do so with authority, implicitly declaring to the listening subject that he/she is contemplating the contents of his/her essence, a process summed up by Lawrence Kramer as a forceful rite of initiation: "My essence is imposed on me as a fate and as such is, in another sense, fatal" (*Opera and Modern Culture* 109).

In this regard, the unique power of the trained operatic voice, one that conveys tremors of pleasure, goosebumps and can make even the hardened listener shed tears, should not be underestimated.⁶⁴

As both Nietzsche and Vernon Lee noticed, such emotional might comes with profound ethical responsibilities, which they felt the composer eluded in order to strengthen his hold on his audience by means of acoustic seduction.⁶⁵ In short, if the music pretends to speak on our behalf, it is doing so without asking for consent:

It [the music] becomes the mere accompaniment, diffluent, vague, but always appropriate through its strange sound quality and its lack of rhythm, of the hearer's inner monologue; a monologue without words or logical forms, but only the more absorbing in its welter of images and feelings. And now, by a phenomenon well known to psychologists, the music and the hearer seem to exchange place and function. *You seem to be living in the music*, its *pianos* and *fortes*, *crescendos* and *smorzandos*, &c., &c., becoming modes of *your* life; while, on the other hand, *the music seems to be telling you what you are really telling yourself in your listless letting yourself go to your memories and your hopes.* (881-882)

Though the medical term “diffluent” usually designates the deliquescence of a bodily organ, Vernon Lee uses the expression in order to allude to the constant flux of the music, which overflows with such unprecedented range of feeling as to appear like an accurate replica of human consciousness and its uninterrupted stream of thought. Here, according to Lee, comes the true revelation bestowed by Wagner on his audience. Instead of the metaphysical epiphany theorized by Schopenhauer as music's true privilege, we are presented with a disclosure of a personal nature; we hear our own thoughts articulated by the music, which mirrors them right back at us, thus feeding our interior monologue with its input. Through the combination of entrancing stage performances and an exacerbated musical language imitating the various “modes of *your* life,” the

⁶⁴ According to Lawrence Kramer, it is precisely the force of the operatic voice that seizes the subject and performs the work of “symbolic investiture,” a rite of initiation based on a Bourdieusian concept defined by Kramer as “the process by which social institutions grasp the inner being of the individual in its essence, and in so doing both define and confer that essence” (*Opera and Modern Culture* 5-6).

⁶⁵ In this they seemed to anticipate later discussions conflating Wagnerian music drama and fascism on which Walter Benjamin was at the forefront with his notion of “aestheticization of politics.”

listener's "inner monologue" is amplified, thereby making the contents of his/her own consciousness more readily available than they usually are in everyday life.

In sum, Dujardin was in agreement with Lee when he described the special linguistic prowess of Wagnerian music as one making evident "le spécial langage du monde supérieur de l'âme" (*La Revue de Genève* XI 258). To be sure, the Symbolist interest in Wagner's multilayered musical language and story-telling corresponded with a particular ethos prevalent in the late nineteenth century, one that saw the emergence of a questioning of the hitherto assumed transparency of language and the creation of the field of semiotics a few years later. By means of example, in 1886, the philosopher Frédéric Paulhan (the father of Jean) published a semi-scientific piece called "Le langage intérieur et la pensée" in which he conjectured that our "inner language" is made of "impressions auditives et visuelles" as well as "images faibles que l'observation intérieure néglige et n'aperçoit pas" (28). In this light, it becomes clear what Dujardin meant when he wrote in *Mallarmé par un des siens* that Wagner's music responded to his deepest unconscious needs because it provided a means of articulating these fleeting nonverbal impressions in an alternative language that could translate them adequately. It is thus possible to envisage Dujardin's first novel, *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887), which was almost contemporary with Paulhan's piece, as an attempt to satisfy a longing to put in writing the disparate mental bits and pieces that reveal themselves in the moment of musical performance. Through the device of the interior monologue, such fleeting feelings as half-formed desires and hidden fears are able to find an adequate means of expression.

Much like the anonymous poet of *La Fin d'Antonia*, the central character in *Les Lauriers*, Daniel Prince, shares many core characteristics with its creator, yet he remains insignificant enough to be a Mallarmean "type," that is, the polar opposite of a Wagnerian hero. Significantly,

there was a blueprint for Prince, which further establishes his lack of originality as an individual. It was drawn up two years prior to the release of *Les Lauriers* as part of a short story from *Les Hantises* entitled “Histoire d’une journée.” Its plot will be quite familiar to the reader of *Les Lauriers*, as it features another young law student from Normandy, Maurice Dupont, who goes about his usual daily business much like an automaton: “Monsieur Maurice Dupont se lève entre sept et huit heures et ne se demande pas ce qu’il fera pendant la journée” (165). But beyond these obvious biographical parallels, what Daniel Prince and Maurice Dupont have most in common is their need to please and impress, in other words, to be a successful lead actor in their own Parisian fin-de-siècle play, as Dujardin makes clear at the end of “Histoire”: “il se complaisait à l’imitation ; il se délectait de paraître ; il jouissait de l’illusion...” (176). Both nobodies dreaming of breaking into Parisian high society; Dupont and Prince are persuaded that adopting its language, guise and manners will ensure their future success, or as Kathleen McKilligan has explained: “Perhaps a case of ‘fake it until you make it’, appearances seem to betray a wish to influence other people’s perception of the self so that in return, this image becomes true” (34). If “Histoire” which is after all a conventional third-person narrative, and *Les Lauriers* do not resemble each other formally, both texts revolve around the same axis of desire, one in which the protagonist fancies himself successful both professionally and romantically, but is in fact an object of light ridicule, for their interlocutors and the reader alike.

As evidence for the theatrical undercurrent so prevalent in *Les Lauriers* stands a preparatory note, which helps bring out the original connection between inner and theatrical monologues: “Drame d’un seul personnage dont est uniquement évoquée la suite des idées pendant quelques heures, ce roman devant être joué, c’est à dire MENTALEMENT JOUÉ par le lecteur”

(quoted in Carmen Licari's introduction to *Les Lauriers* 50).⁶⁶ Unlike a conventional play, however, all conversations ring hollow while the would-be love scenes are marred by Prince's embarrassment and his love interest's lack of emotional involvement: "de quoi lui parler ? de son théâtre ? c'est assommant; c'est un sujet" (100). However, the most humiliating aspect of it all remains Prince's delusions of romantic grandeur concerning the woman he fancies, Léa, a small-time actress who exploits his longing to gain entry into her bed in order to fund her household and ever-expanding wardrobe.⁶⁷

Yet for all of the intensity of his sexual desire for Léa, Prince has convinced himself that he loves her platonically. This is all a ploy, however, as choosing the nonphysical route has more to do with status than true inclinations. Not sleeping with his mistress would ensure Prince's belonging to a higher world, a crowning achievement that would separate him from his weaker friends who cannot help but fall prey to their animalistic inclinations: "Ah ! la chère pauvre, je veux l'aimer, et d'un dévot amour, comme il faut aimer, non comme les autres aiment" (54). Periodically, his unconscious mind—which remains entrenched in the truth in spite of Prince's constant mental gymnastics to bend reality to his will—reminds him of the extent of his sexual frustration, with each woman encountered on the street being an object of grotesque temptation: "Une femme devant nous; grande, svelte; oh ! cette taille cambrée, ce parfum violent et ces cheveux roux luisants (...) elle m'a regardé; quels yeux provocants !" (44) All of these sexualized descriptions show the male *flâneur's* tendency towards objectification that stands in stark contrast with Prince's constant infantilization of Léa.

⁶⁶ Laurent Jenny speculates that Dujardin's invention of the interior monologue may have gone under the radar due to the sheer abundance of theatrical monologues, both at literary salons and the theater. This "monologic" trend may have confused Dujardin's contemporaries as to the actual originality and merit of the new literary form he employed. (*La Fin de l'intériorité* 35)

⁶⁷ Like Antonia, Léa had a real-life model, an unknown actress named Andrée de Mora with whom Dujardin was involved between 1883 and 1885. A collection of four photos in the Austin archive shows how Mora may have been an inspiration for Léa, as she also did play pants roles.

The butt of the joke is that she herself sees Prince as a sexless presence, in other words, a child: “Vous êtes un enfant” (94). And indeed, this rather inexperienced young man is emotionally puerile, stilted and suffering from impostor syndrome. Yet he is far from a unique case and exhibits the signs of a typically fin-de-siècle fear of performance in the area of courtship and sex, a reading I share in part with Italo Calvino:

Il monologo interiore rivela la sensualità inappagata che sta dietro alle pose programmaticamente sublimi del preteso innamorato platonico; ma ancora dietro a questa scorgiamo la perpetua fuga della donna, la paura del sesso, l'incertezza ossessiva sulla propria virilità, l'introversione narcisista che diventa rifiuto d'ogni vero rapporto con gli altri (quoted in Licari's introduction 28).⁶⁸

If Prince's magnificent surname indicates he has a lot to live up to, his shortcomings are nevertheless endearing enough for Dujardin to secure the reader's involvement in this imaginary play through and through. The progression of the novella can thus be considered to be a mental striptease of sorts in which the reader awaits the next embarrassing detail that will make Prince's alternate reality collapse through a public admission of his fears. But no such thing happens: as Prince's relationship to Léa remains unconsummated and he takes leave of her apartment, the author seems to imply that these six hours in Prince's life are bound to repeat themselves in an endless cycle of self-deception.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ This text was written as a preface to an Italian translation of *Les Lauriers, I Lauri senza fronde* (1975): “The interior monologue reveals the unappeased sensuality that lies behind the sublime pre-programmed poses of the allegedly platonic lover; and also what lies further behind, we catch sight of the perpetual flight of women, the fear of sex, the obsessive uncertainty concerning one's virility, the narcissistic introversion that becomes a denial of any true relationship with others” (My translation).

⁶⁹ Dujardin's second wife, Marie Dujardin, did write a sequel for *Les Lauriers*, which suggests Prince was unable to move past the events of his youth and thus confirms the cyclical reading I am proposing here. Entitled *La Belle que voici* (1949), this third-person narrative is centered on the character of Léa's daughter, Géraldine, who is seduced by an older embittered Prince, seeking revenge for his mother's behavior towards him. In this novel, Prince is repeatedly described as “l'homme myope”—a condition he shared with Dujardin—and demonstrates the same obliviousness to other people's motives as in the original. If blindness was only metaphorical in *Les Lauriers*, its sequel reinforces the power of an image befitting the protagonist's warped perception of reality.

However, *Les Lauriers*'s flirtation with repetition has little to do with rambling and rather more with a mimetic illustration of the workings of an *idée fixe*, which periodically impinges on the narrative flow and contaminates Prince's perception of reality. Yet the detailing of Prince's inner life is anything but chaotic. On the contrary, it is reined in by a highly structured three-part narrative. As Cécile Leblanc, and Steven Huebner have already noticed, Dujardin was only applying Wyzewa's guidelines towards the creation of a French Wagnerian literary school: to the total exposure of notions, sensations and feelings resulting in "un confus tourbillon tumultueux" ought to correspond "une forme parfaite" (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 169).⁷⁰

In Wyzewa's view, if Racine had succeeded in reforming an existing genre—Greek tragedy—by aping the novel, it was up to the novel to do the same in 1886 and reclaim its part of drama.⁷¹ The perfect vehicle for such an enterprise would be the fictional representation of "la vie de l'âme," which Wyzewa understood to be inherently dramatic, as the screen where "se joue le drame de l'Univers" (102). However, there ought to be no confusion; this fictional inner life had to be thoroughly delineated so as to prevent dispersion. Thus, Wyzewa's first prescription to his followers was an extremely narrow narrative focus: "Pour restituer une complète vie littéraire, l'artiste devra d'abord borner son effort à la création d'un seul personnage (...) le lecteur, comme l'auteur, verra tout, les choses et les âmes, à travers cette âme unique et précise, dont il vivra la

⁷⁰ If each critic dedicates several pages/paragraphs to the question of Wyzewa's influence over Dujardin, my next chapter, which is entirely dedicated to Teodor de Wyzewa, will provide additional context and commentary. On Wyzewa and Dujardin, see Leblanc (262-267) and Huebner (63-64).

⁷¹ Let us note here that Dujardin had originally planned on dedicating the novel to Wyzewa, before he settled on the more surprising choice of Racine. Here is the content of the scrapped dedication, which contains its load of Wagnerian concepts, from aesthetic continuity to a desire to restore the French language to its etymological roots: "A Monsieur Teodor de Wyzewa, un roman de vie ordinaire, mais un roman de quelques heures - d'un seul personnage dont seraient uniquement dites les successions d'idées (visions, sensations, sentimentalités) - aussi où serait disparu le primitif nécessaire travail de l'analyse, un roman de synthèse voulant être directement vécu, - et d'une écriture plus rationnellement (plus étymologiquement) française - ne serait-ce pas quelque chose approchant au rêve d'une vie faite plus vivante ? Par l'ouvrier qui en une œuvre sienne a tâché (de faire) une réalisation des lointaines théories idéales, jadis en commun méditées, est dédié cet essai" (Licari 47-8).

vie” (169). The final purpose of such restrictions was to unveil the functioning of human thought as it had been divulged through the experience of Wagnerian drama, something Wyzewa proposed to perform via the imitation of patterns of inner thought including auditory and visual elements: “On n’aura plus des perceptions isolées, inexpliquées, mais la génération même, continue, des états mentaux” (170). This begs the question: did Wyzewa, himself a novelist, or Dujardin, succeed in applying this ambitious program? Is the literature that was inspired by those principles remotely Wagnerian?

Les Lauriers is a somewhat ambiguous case of a *bona fide* Wagner-inspired text. At first glance, there are no thematic parallels whatsoever, while the only musical instances included in the text are mostly taken from popular French works of musical theater. To begin with, there is the title of the novel itself, which is a quotation from the second line of an 18th-century children's song, *Nous n’irons plus au bois*, allegedly composed by Madame de Pompadour to amuse children from a neighboring village. From George Sand, to Gustav Mahler to Claude Debussy, the song has come to symbolize childlike innocence.⁷² Yet its true frame of reference is unsavory, the laurels being shorthand for prostitution in Versailles, where braids would signal the existence of a brothel to potential customers.⁷³

Then there is the issue of musical references: from mentions of French *opéra-comique*, such as Boieldieu’s *La Dame blanche* (1825), Adam’s *Le Chalet* (1834) and its “refrain du

⁷² Sand mentions the “ronde” in her autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie* vol. 2 (161) while Mahler uses the motif in the third movement of his first symphony and Debussy quotes from the folk song in his *Jardin sous la pluie* (1903). Steven Huebner interprets the title as “a quotation from the folk song ‘Nous n’irons plus au bois,’ signifying the protagonist’s nostalgic look backward at a youth lived in the provinces” (62).

⁷³ See the *Routledge Dictionary of Cultural References in Modern French*: “This text refers to the sexual practices prevalent at the court of Versailles of Louis XIV. The thousands of workers employed to build the château brought in their wake hordes of prostitutes. (...) Their activity was restricted by royal order but they simply took to exercising their trade in special houses” (26).

Another possible inspiration for the title comes from Théodore de Banville’s 1846 poem, “Nous n’irons plus au bois,” which makes use of the popular song by quoting its first couple of lines in the first verse. For other interpretations of the title, see Malinowski’s *Le Roman du symbolisme* (91-95).

bivouac,” and Audran’s *La Mascotte* (1880), to the more noble *grand opéra* tradition with Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable* (1831), the music is surprisingly anti-Wagnerian and has been ignored as such by critics who were perhaps too eager to establish the impact of Dujardin’s Wagnerism on *Les Lauriers*. And when the novel features an instrument with which to play these tunes, the chosen medium is of a less noble extraction than the harpsichord from *À la gloire*: it is a barrel organ, in other words a metonymy for street music that seems more at home in a Laforgue poem than in Wagner.⁷⁴

In the absence of obvious connections, many a scholar, such as Anthony Suter, Julia Przyboś, or Valérie Michelet-Jacquod, has fallen for the idea of structural borrowings, using Dujardin’s belated assertion that his novel was written with Wagnerian leitmotifs as their clue: “si pourtant l’on regarde de près les *Lauriers* sont coupés, on verra qu’ils sont pleins de leit-motifs...” (“Le monologue intérieur” 229).⁷⁵ As Steven Huebner has demonstrated, this is a problematic statement to say the least and one that takes for granted the possibility of literal intermedial transposition in a way that runs almost contrary to the loosely adapted Wagnerian ideas and redefinitions of concepts that were a staple of the other works I investigated in this chapter.⁷⁶ While Dujardin quoted specific instances where he believed his own repetitions to be representative of the Wagnerian technique, these have to be disregarded based on definition alone.⁷⁷ If anything, the

⁷⁴ Laforgue is the author of two poems taking the barrel organ as a subject. See “Complainte de l’orgue de Barbarie” and “Autre complainte de l’orgue de Barbarie” in *Les Complaintes*. On Laforgue’s predilection for the instrument, Jean-Pierre Bertrand writes in his critical edition of *Complaintes*: “sans doute celui-ci exprime-t-il le mieux à la fois le ton de sa poésie (grinçante, lancinante, larmoyante) et son caractère désenchanté” (159).

⁷⁵ For thorough discussions of Dujardin’s use of literary leitmotifs in *Les Lauriers*, see Suter (L-LIV), Höhnisch’s *Das Gefangene Ich* (128-31), Michelet-Jacquod (292-294), and Huebner (61-63). As for Julia Przyboś, she writes: “En littérature, Dujardin cherche à créer l’équivalent de la phrase musicale de Wagner” (137).

⁷⁶ As Huebner notes, Dujardin’s demonstration of the presence of leitmotifs in *Les Lauriers* in “Le monologue intérieur” is performed via examples that are “unpersuasive as illustrations of the technique” (61).

⁷⁷ For the purposes of my argument, I would like to provide a more solid definition of Wagnerian leitmotif, this one taken from the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*. “A musical fragment, related to some aspect of the drama, that recurs in the course of an opera. (...) The term leitmotif is used most often in connection with Wagner’s later works, although Wagner himself preferred the terms *Grundthema* and *Hauptmotiv*, among others. Wagner achieved through the leitmotif a synthesis of two important 19th-century compositional techniques - thematic recollection and thematic

short units he designated are thematic reminiscences brought about by more or less conscious associations, be they musical or situational, as Jean-Pierre Bertrand observed in his introduction to *Les Lauriers*: “poétique de l’association (...) à l’œuvre non seulement au sein de telle ou telle scène, mais dans la structure même du roman” (28). But let me examine one supposed leitmotif in *Les Lauriers* provided by Dujardin himself more closely and reflect further on what he may have meant by “leitmotif.”

Consider the opening paragraphs of the novella, which reappear, albeit in modified form, once Daniel Prince has taken his place in a coach with Léa:

Chapter I

(...) Car sous le chaos des apparences, parmi les durées et les sites, dans l’illusion des choses qui s’engendrent et qui s’enfantent, un parmi les autres, un comme avec les autres, distinct des autres, semblable aux autres, un le même et un de plus, de l’infini des possibles existences, je surgis ; et voici que le temps et le lieu se précisent; c’est l’aujourd’hui ; c’est l’ici ; l’heure qui sonne ; et autour de moi, la vie ; l’heure, le lieu, un soir d’avril, Paris (...) (39)

Chapter VIII

Dans les rues la voiture en marche...

...Un de la foule illimitée des existences, telle je mène désormais ma course, un définitivement parmi les autres ; tels se sont à moi créés l’aujourd’hui, l’ici, l’heure, la vie, une âme qui vole à des songes d’embrassement, c’est cela ; c’est un songe féminin, l’aujourd’hui ... (96)

It might seem obvious that these two passages are in fact too long to constitute a leitmotif proper because the latter usually only take up a few bars. The only element they have in common with the Wagnerian device is the fact that the words that are reiterated evolve in their form, straying

transformation. Recurring themes are found in French, Italian, and German operas written at least a generation before Wagner. In such cases, the dramatic reference is fairly specific (sometimes words and music recur together), and the musical recollection is fairly exact. (...) Leitmotifs combine both dramatic and musical functions, often in complex ways. They may simply emphasize aurally what is seen on stage, or suggest to the listener something unseen that is being thought by one of the characters - a recollection, intuition, or prediction. Leitmotifs, thus, can show relationships - between present and past, between action and underlying motivation. Beyond presenting an exegesis of the action, the leitmotifs are the material from which the musical substance is constructed, just as motifs would be for an instrumental composer; in music drama, however, musical development inevitably suggests dramatic development” (460).

from strict repetition and changing slightly in order to better fit the present mood. In musical terms, the leitmotif could be displaced, transitioning from the melody to being buried in the bass line, or distorted harmonically. Rhythmic patterns might be elongated or shortened, while pitches may be transposed to another key. Likewise, in this excerpt, certain words are being reintroduced in an order that is reminiscent of the original, including the series “aujourd’hui/ici/heure/vie,” but with new interjections that muddy the waters of familiarity. They do, however, share more ground on a thematic level: while Daniel Prince emerges *ex nihilo* as a lone *flâneur* in the first chapter, in chapter eight a mysterious “songe féminin” has replaced Paris as his main companion.⁷⁸ In both instances, he is shown to be a victim of his fixation on Léa, which is the theme underpinning the repetition in the first place.

In “Le monologue intérieur,” the same essay in which Dujardin assured his reader that the influence of Wagnerian leitmotif was crucial in shaping his own form of interior monologue, he also provided a definition of the leitmotif that sheds some light on his intentions:

De même que le plus souvent une page de Wagner est une succession de motifs non développés dont chacun exprime un mouvement d’âme, le monologue intérieur est une succession de phrases courtes dont chacune exprime également un mouvement d’âme, avec cette ressemblance qu’elles ne sont pas liées les unes aux autres suivant un ordre rationnel mais suivant un ordre purement émotionnel, en dehors de tout arrangement intellectualisé. (“Le monologue intérieur” 226)

The lack of logic invoked by Dujardin is reminiscent of Lee’s assessment of Wagnerian music as diffident or “going nowhere,” (872) and so is the notion that the music/flow of words imitate the short attention span characteristic of everyday thought. In this passage, the terms “motifs” and “développés,” allude to classical forms such as variations, fugues, sonata form, etc. while the Wagnerian leitmotif, is determined to be “non développé.” This contrast in development is of

⁷⁸ On Prince as flâneur, see Stefan Buck’s *Dujardin als Repräsentant des Fin de siècle*, which emphasizes the isolation of the night wanderer in newly Haussmannized Paris: “In dem unzusammenhängenden Nebeneinander von Menschen und Dingen in einer Großstadt wächst das Gefühl der Vereinzelung ihres Betrachters” (98).

special importance, with the pre-meditated dramaturgy of the sonata form (a rational order in which the classical motives/themes have their given places) missing in Wagner and the interior monologue, having been replaced by a perceived purely subjective emotional order.⁷⁹ Being authentic to Prince's personal experience with a form supple enough to include its meanderings allows for the occasional appearance of what Dujardin called "jaillissement," a short unit that is perhaps a more accurate term for the literary "leitmotif" and works according to the law of association.⁸⁰

Incidentally, the most compelling example of such effusion in the novel takes the form of diegetic music. In chapter VI, while Prince roams the streets of Paris, he encounters a street musician playing the barrel organ, the melody of which Dujardin quotes directly with the help of a musical score. It is an earworm of sorts, or "air à danser, une sorte de valse," (83) in fact a popular duet from Audran's operetta, *La Mascotte*, starring a farm girl, Bettina, and her shepherd lover, Pippo: the charmingly démodé *duo des dindons*. Neither excerpt is an accurate transcription of the original, nor are they given in their actual order, the first corresponding to the phrase "j't'aim mieux qu'mes dindons," which is in fact preceded in the score by the second excerpt: "comme un tremblement qui m'agite" the lyrics of which go unmentioned by Prince:

⁷⁹ Léon Guichard has justly taken issue with this idea of non-development in Wagner: "Comment cette *discontinuité* du discours wagnérien se concilie-t-elle avec la *mélodie continue* ? C'est ce que Dujardin n'explique pas. Comment peut-on éprouver, à l'audition d'une page de Wagner, une impression de mosaïque ? Et comment peut-on prétendre que l'arrangement de motifs dans une page de Wagner ne soit pas au moins autant 'intellectualisé' qu'émotionnel' ?" (218) Although I absolutely agree with this objection, I have tried to take on a more "generous" viewpoint in giving Dujardin the benefit of the doubt. Surely, as someone who had taken composition lessons, he was aware of what he wrote here concerning this notion of development, hence my interpretation, which sees this term in connection with wider music history and sonata form.

⁸⁰ The term came from Jules Romains, whose definition of his own literary school, "unanimité," was quoted by Dujardin in 1919, before he began appropriating the term "jaillissement" for his own works: "La poésie, la littérature unanime, au contraire, veut être un jaillissement spontané du réel et de l'âme. Entre la vie et nous nous refusons d'interposer l'écran de la raison abstraite" (quoted in *De Stéphane Mallarmé au prophète Ezéchiel* 25).



(*La Revue indépendante* 9 123-124)

The fact that Prince specifically selected these two sentences is not incidental: both of them are uttered by Bettina and speak of true romantic attachment. As he passes by the street singer and the latter's voice gently fades away, Prince's highly subjective reinterpretation of the tune takes over—only this time, the amusing countryside context is replaced by a nobler 17th-century pastoral scene out of *L'Astrée*: “le calme d’une voix qui naît, sous un paysage calme, dans un calme amoureux, et le désir très contenu d’une naissante voix; et la voix répondante, équivalente et plus haute (...) ascendante en le désir...” (Idem). Shepherds are a regular fixture in Dujardin's fiction, from the Paris-like tempter who seduces the gullible Antonia in the first play of the dramatic trilogy, to a later poem, which brings forth a counterpoint to the masculine viewpoint embodied by Prince. This 1892 prose piece, “Réponse de la bergère au berger,” stages a poetic war between the sexes and urges the young shepherd to call off the search for a heavenly lover, yet another Antonia, in favor of an earthly woman who shall reciprocate his feelings with constancy and loyalty. In short, Prince should take the shepherdess's advice to heart and settle for a Bettina-like woman, instead of recasting her as a watered-down version of Antonia.⁸¹

As a matter of fact, the *Mascotte* duet seems to mirror the process of identification so prevalent in Wagnerian opera—the subjective screen—with Prince believing the lyrics to be addressing him and his imaginary relationship directly.⁸² Prince's take on *La Mascotte*, moreover,

⁸¹ Incidentally, this is exactly the same lesson the Chevalier Valbert goes through in Wyzewa's novel, getting engaged to Alice, a young and innocent woman he has fortuitously met in Provence with her sister, at the very end of the novel.

⁸² The process of identification recalls these verses from Jean Richepin's *La Chanson des gueux* (1871) in which there is a poem featuring a barrel organ, “Variations de printemps sur l'orgue de Barbarie”: “Qui sait ce que pour nous met

seems to be a retort to the introductory paragraphs of the novel. Through the vehicle of this innocuous duet, he is able to regain control over his own destiny and beat his solitude, as the progressive decomposition of the original musical sentence would prove: “je t’aime amie (...) mieux je t’aime...,” with the latter unit being repeated five times in the same page, becoming a mantra of sorts in the face of his less glorious reality. In the next chapter, the motif reappears, only to be accidentally uttered by Léa: “Je serais plus heureuse à garder des dindons en Bretagne” (89), which Prince surely takes as a sign that they are connected in spirit. Léa’s inadvertent appeal to the love motif is so powerful a tool for reverie that it prompts Prince to fall asleep alongside her, in spite of their close physical proximity, which has awakened his latent sexual desire for her: “elle dort; moi je sens que je m’endors; j’entreferme mes yeux...voilà son corps (...) là...au cours des boulevards...‘j’t’aim’ mieux qu’mes moutons’...j’t’aim’ mieux...cette fille, les yeux éhontés, frêle, aux lèvres rouges...la chambre...la cheminée haute...” (92). Here, the function of the lowbrow musical association becomes clearer: taken at face value, it is a tool with which to reveal Léa’s true nature as a “demoiselle qui joue les travestis aux Nouveautés” (110). Unfortunately for Prince, only the reader and Dujardin are fully aware of the irony at play in Prince having equated Léa with a motif such as the turkey duet.

If any doubt remained over the sarcastic mindset involved in choosing *La Mascotte* as a motif in *Les Lauriers*, one letter from Wyzewa to Dujardin, written in the summer of 1886 while Wyzewa was working as a preceptor, derides the philistine-like taste of the affluent family who had hired him by taking a quick jab at the very same operetta: “Un énorme château, seul dans les champs, à six kilomètres de toute ville ou bourgade: des pianos, mais ici je ne peux qu’entendre jouer *la Mascotte* et des ballets de Delibes. La merde, en résumé” (September 8, 1886 HRC Folder

le musicien ?/Mais dans l’enivrement que j’éprouve à l’entendre/Qui sait ce que je mets ? Lui-même il n’en sait rien” (106).

91.6). Given the closeness of Wyzewa and Dujardin at the time and the fact that Dujardin had begun drafting *Les Lauriers* in May 1886, it would not be a stretch to infer a similar distaste on his part.⁸³

Yet many critics have understood key scenes in *Les Lauriers* to be indebted to Wagner: the introduction of Daniel Prince has been compared with the slow emergence of melody out of the ground harmony of Eb major in the *Rheingold* prelude by Huebner, while the sweet night reverie prompted by the opening of the window in Prince's bedroom in chapter IV is redolent of *Tristan's* nocturnal love-making for Suter, as for Maynard, she invokes an invisible Wagnerian geography present throughout the novel with stops including the Garnier Opera and the Eden-Théâtre. However, none of these astute parallels would tend to prove that the novel was inspired by Wagnerian principles throughout. In effect, they only point to a ghostly presence and the same case of influence in *Les Lauriers* could easily be made for Wyzewa, or Mallarmé, not to mention Racine.⁸⁴ In this light, Wagner would only be one of the many voices informing the novella's groundbreaking style. Yet *Les Lauriers* is a text that undeniably relies on music, as I have demonstrated above, especially so with its use of repetition and association, not to mention its

⁸³ Certainly, this opinion stands in sharp contrast with Nietzsche's who attended a performance of *la Mascotte* in Nice in 1888, the same year he wrote *The Case of Wagner* in which he praised Bizet's *Carmen* as an antidote to Wagnerian opera. He wrote his friend Heinrich Köselitz: "Diese in keinem Punkte gemein werdende Musik, mit soviel hübschen, geistreichen kleinen Melodien, gehört ganz in die idyllische Art Sein, die ich jetzt Abends nöthig habe" (*Nietzsche Source*. <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1888,1122>. Accessed March 23, 2018). / "This music, which is never vulgar and so full of pretty ingenious little melodies, exactly fits the sort of idyllic existence which I now need of an evening" (*Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche* 239).

⁸⁴ The dedication to Racine has been the object of much critical speculation, but I tend to find Valéry Larbaud's assessment to be one of the most convincing hypotheses. According to Larbaud, this dedication to Racine is almost rhetorical: it is as if Dujardin were anticipating the reproach that his work did not align with French literary tradition by relying too heavily on its Germanic influences: "Il n'est pas non plus, croyons-nous, nécessaire de répondre à ces critiques qui ont dit que le monologue intérieur était quelque chose de contraire à la tradition française. Il faudrait d'abord rechercher les limites et l'essence même de la "tradition française" ! Mais Édouard Dujardin n'a-t-il pas répondu d'avance à ce reproche à la fois vague et formidable, en consacrant *Les Lauriers sont coupés* à la mémoire de Racine ?" (16) I should also add that Dujardin borrowed the characterization of Racine as a novelist from Wyzewa, as made obvious in the article "Notes sur la littérature wagnérienne" : "Les tragédies de Racine furent des romans psychologiques, restituant dans l'art la vie rationnelle des passions..." (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 159).

attention to sonic effects, rhythm, alliterations and evocative ellipses, all of which have been investigated by Ben Hutchinson in his article.⁸⁵ However, I am rather more convinced by a more profound—if more slippery—type of connection, one that is based on Dujardin’s perspicacious understanding of Wagner’s music drama as “roman dialogué,” crafted by a musician capable of mystically revealing “les ineffables intimités des âmes” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 162).

If Wagner is the appropriate philosophical reference for *Les Lauriers*, the comparison cannot be sustained on a tonal level. In fact, *Les Lauriers*’s particular mixture of light comedy and irony, its reliance on Parisian life as a reservoir of anecdotes, as well as its ludic formal invention are qualities I would more readily associate with a more lighthearted musical model: the one of Jacques Offenbach. In 1895, around the time he had officially renounced his former ardent Wagnerism in the press, Dujardin published an article entitled “De la Périhole et l’absolu en musique,” which he dedicated to the Wagnerian conductor, Édouard Colonne, in the hopes of attracting his attention to the cause of Offenbach, a musician Dujardin deemed just as worthy of being on the main stage as Berlioz and Wagner.

Anticipating the defensive approach that became a hallmark of later essays concerning the heritage of Symbolism, Dujardin assumed a somewhat polemical tone in order to promote the ample merits of the operetta *La Périhole* (1850). As a former notorious Wagner supporter, Dujardin’s sudden confession of admiration for Offenbach may be somewhat comparable to Nietzsche’s reappraisal of *Carmen*, an opera he described as a healthy alternative to Wagnerian music drama in the introduction to *The Case of Wagner*.⁸⁶ Likewise, Dujardin was keen to steer

⁸⁵ See “Une écriture blanche? Style and Symbolism in Édouard Dujardin’s *Les Lauriers sont coupés*” (2011).

⁸⁶ Throughout his career, Wagner made a number of contentious remarks about Offenbach and his music that were largely fueled by his anti-Semitism. Like Meyerbeer, Offenbach’s success as a German Jewish composer in Paris was greatly envied by Wagner. The *coup de grâce* occurred when Offenbach decided to satirize Wagner in “La Symphonie de l’avenir” (1860), a short farce in which the *Lohengrin* wedding march is mercilessly parodied along with the composer’s ambitions to craft “the music of the future.” From then on, Wagner saw Offenbach as his personal enemy,

Offenbach away from his usual frivolous reputation for the purpose of shedding light on his moral and musical excellence. In order to do so, he had to distinguish his works from the plethora of mediocre operettas that had come to bear their mark on French popular culture at the time, a goal he accomplished by using Audran's works as a foil: "il y a là tout autre chose que les valse et les romances de *La Mascotte* ou de *Miss Helyett*" (*La Revue blanche* IX 19). This disparagement of Audran in the Offenbach article further supports the view that the turkey duet variations in *Les Lauriers* were entirely tongue-in-cheek.

Beyond Dujardin's avowed wish to influence Colonne, this article is notable for its reflection on the hierarchization of genre and the implications it may have on such a piece of minor literature as *Les Lauriers sont coupés*. Indeed, it is tempting to see some of the concepts applied by Dujardin to Offenbach—a musician he regarded to be on a par with the greats: "Les opérettes d'Offenbach sont des drames. Les couplets, les duos, les chansons à boire y ont la même place que dans les plus authentiques opéras des maîtres classiques" (19)—as a vindication of Dujardin's reputation as a dilettante. As he saw it, Offenbach's music was just as capable of portraying the very same core human feelings as Wagner's, while possessing a similar ability to convey a sense of the absolute, as the title of the piece would suggest.

If anything, Offenbach's renown as a public entertainer obscured his other qualities and attracted a fair amount of scrutiny from music critics: "Et pourquoi celui que le souci des choses d'art préoccupe n'avouerait-il pas que la musique d'Offenbach, quoiqu'on en ait dit et cru, est de l'art, du plus pur et du plus authentique, tout comme les symphonies de Beethoven ?" (Idem) Dujardin's reference to authenticity was perhaps a veiled allusion to the structure of French operetta, a clearly delineated art form with a rigid structure where sung pieces alternate with

although *Eine Kapitulation* shows some borrowings from Offenbach's *bouffe* aesthetic. For more information, see Laurence Senelick's "Offenbach, Wagner, Nietzsche: the Polemics of Opera." (2016).

spoken interludes in a manner that imitates the delicate balancing act Dujardin believed to be characteristic of the human mind.⁸⁷ Coincidentally, this was exactly how he described the aesthetic of *Les Lauriers* to Vittorio Pica: “la vie d’âme est un continu emmêlement de lyrisme et de prose; le roman qui voudra dire la vie d’âme sera balancé incessamment entre l’exaltation poétique et le quelconque du quotidien vulgaire” (quoted in Weissman 491). If Romanticism had defined itself by its constant oscillation between the opposite poles of the sublime and the grotesque, Dujardin preferred another stylistic dialectic: one swinging to and fro between prose and poetry in the same narrative.

The article finishes on a somewhat exultant note where Wagner and Offenbach, both of Dujardin’s contradictory poles if we will, are brought together on account of their respective genius:

Ce qu’on appelle le coup de folie, chez Offenbach, est-ce autre chose, au fond, que ce qu’on appelle le coup de génie chez d’autres ? (...) Le génie et la folie, en art, c’est de tout oser, mais de tout oser avec succès. C’est ainsi que si souvent Richard Wagner a atteint les plus nobles expressions, lui qui n’a jamais reculé devant la réalisation de ses conceptions les plus génialement folles (22)

Arguably, Dujardin’s extravagant project of transcribing the totality of human emotion within the course of six hours of the life of a sole protagonist can be understood as the symptom of a similar type of creative madness. As a matter of fact, Dujardin’s contemporaries were highly perceptive of the unfeasibility of the task, as Charles Morice’s account would attest: “cet étonnant ouvrage, *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, où il voulut noter, exactement et minutieusement, tous les faits, gestes, paroles, pensées, sentiments et sensations d’un personnage précisé durant un temps donné. Ce travail, qui n’est pas littéraire, est en outre impossible” (*La Littérature de tout à l’heure* 347).

⁸⁷ Coincidentally, this is also the general format of “opéra comique,” the most quintessentially French operatic genre since 17th-century “tragédie lyrique.” An admirer of the genre was Laforgue, who began the short story “Le miracle des roses” in his *Moralités légendaires* with the nostalgic—if somewhat ironic—exclamation: “Ah ! que tout n’est-il opéra comique !...” (93).

However, if Dujardin's characters show a certain level of self-delusion, their creator was keenly aware of his inability to be truly exhaustive in writing. His self-defeating tone in later revisionist essays, such as "Le monologue intérieur," is therefore not mere *coquetterie* on his part.

In truth, Dujardin downplays the fact that he took the lead in crafting a new form of experimental literature that embraced its own limits, thus anticipating future 20th-century novelistic experiments, from Larbaud, to Schnitzler, to Joyce. *Les Lauriers* and the *Antonia* trilogy can thus be considered as prototypes for modern literature, with their overt Wagnerian longing towards totality consciously fracturing in the face of the unfeasibility of the task. Herein lies the true extent of Wagner's appearance in *Les Lauriers*: his faint presence would in fact symbolize an impetus to push literature towards a redefinition of itself and a reexamination of its purpose. What he embodies is a combative image for the avant-garde to model itself after and accomplish its work of renovation.

Chapter 3
Escaping the Ivory Tower:
Teodor de Wyzewa's Critique of Wagner

“Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
 Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre”
 (Mallarmé, “Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui”)

Conservative fantasies of restoration paradoxically abound in late nineteenth-century French avant-gardist poetic movements. Believing the modern world to be fragmented beyond repair, both the Parnassians and Symbolists posit an alternative in the form of a mythical point of origin somewhere in the Mediterranean where humanity and nature once formed a whole. In spite of some minor differences, the various prelapsarian worlds appearing in the founding imagery of the Parnasse, and in poems by Stéphane Mallarmé, Jean Moréas and Camille Mauclair, all manifest a longing for the bygone unity of language and music, the first step towards a more harmonious world. Theirs is a rearward glance similar to Rousseau's depiction of idealized primitive societies as seen in this passage from *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750): “C'est un beau rivage, paré des seules mains de la nature, vers lequel on tourne incessamment les yeux, et dont on se sent éloigner à regret” (*Œuvres complètes* III 22). The very inaccessibility of this mythical shore is in effect part of the allure: since the land it borders is unknowable, its image is endlessly malleable and may fit various agendas, a plasticity that explains its durability as an aesthetic telos from the Enlightenment onward.

Rousseau's atavistic mode of thinking and his spurious theories on the interdependence of nature, music and language prospered in Romanticism, arguably culminating in Richard Wagner's theoretical writings, especially those penned between 1849 and 1852 in Zürich shortly after he was exiled from Dresden due to his revolutionary activities.¹ *The Artwork of the Future* (1849), for

¹ It is unclear whether or not Wagner did read Rousseau attentively. Thomas S. Grey speculates that Wagner must have enjoyed a level of familiarity with Rousseau's ideas due to the similarities between Wagner's discussion of the

instance, begins with the rather Rousseauian observation that nature, humanity and art are inextricably linked, although they were pinned against each other “Von dem Augenblicke an, wo der Mensch seinen Unterschied von der Natur empfand” (*Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* III 54). / from “the moment we humans became aware of our difference from nature” (*The Artwork of the Future: A Special Issue of the Wagner Journal* 13). Yet, contrary to Rousseau who advocated for solitude as a means of reconnecting with nature and saw little potential for the arts to guide us in such an endeavor, Wagner's conviction was that nature and culture could be reconciled with the aid of a communal aesthetic experience:

Gemeinsam werden wir aber auch den Bund der heiligen Nothwendigkeit schließen, und der Bruderkuß, der diesen Bund besiegelt, wird das gemeinsame Kunstwerk der Zukunft sein. In ihm wird auch unser großer Wohlthäter und Erlöser, der Vertreter der Nothwendigkeit in Fleisch und Blut,—das Volk, kein Unterschiedenes, Besonderes mehr sein; denn im Kunstwerk werden wir Eins sein... (62)

Together we will tie the knot of holy necessity and the brotherly kiss that shall seal this bond will be the communal art of the future. Through it our great benefactor and redeemer, the representative of necessity in flesh and blood—the people—will no longer be a group apart, something special; for through the artwork we will become one... (17)

In this other excerpt from *The Artwork of the Future*, the conditions for the long-awaited reunification are made explicit: humanity is indeed capable of being reminded of its primal attachment to nature, but this act of anamnesis has to occur on the occasion of a live artistic event. According to Wagner, such a feat was nothing new: it had been accomplished before, in Hellenic times, where theater was modeled after the likeness of the people and the spectators were able to stand in close proximity with one another in the amphitheater.² Only in modern times, or so he

origins of language in *Oper und Drama* and Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. (*Wagner's Musical Prose* 259).

² John Deathridge elucidated the reason behind Wagner's lifelong admiration for the Greeks in the following passage: “from the start of his career Wagner was in thrall to the idea of the Greeks as the pristine source of a lost culture—an ideal of fundamental origins projected onto the utopian future of a society encumbered by alienated living and a lack of spiritual freedom” (“Wagner, the Greeks and Wolfgang Schadowaldt,” *Dialogos: Hellenic Studies Review* 6 (1999): 133).

believed, had attendees been prevented from bonding with one another due to the fact that ticket sales and its corollary, economic segregation, now presided over the distribution of the people within the space of the theater.

This splintering of audiences along social lines had artistic consequences and was effectively mirrored in the theatrical works themselves. For Wagner, the process was emblemized by the separation and ensuing degradation of the “three primal sisters” of Greek theatre—dance, music and poetry—to the role of mere accessory. Only in their reunification could the long-lost siblings guide individual spectators towards forming a collective united in its shared entrancement. As seen previously, this insistence on like-mindedness in the theater did not solely reflect Wagner’s need for adulation, it was in fact part of a nobler redemptive goal for both aesthetics and humankind, one in which “das Aufgeben des Egoismus in den Kommunismus” (63) is possible / “egoism must be subsumed in communism” (18). But in the theoretical texts from the Zürich years, such lofty aspirations are almost systematically obfuscated by highly eroticized content seemingly threatening the sustained emphasis on togetherness through a resort to individual desire.

The Artwork of the Future is certainly indicative of that trend with a description of the sisters that seems better suited to erotica: “fest umschlungen, Brust an Brust, Glied an Glied, in brünstigem Liebesküsse zu einer einzigen wonniglebendigen Gestalt zu verwachsen” (83). / “firmly embracing, breast on breast, limb on limb” and “blend[ing] in a passionate kiss of love to form one single, gloriously vibrant form” (27). Although the metaphor is admittedly lecherous, recent scholarship from Laurence Dreyfus and Adrian Daub may help illuminate its philosophical *raison d’être* beyond any cheap thrills. In their view, the composer’s frequent appeal to sexualized

content functions like a rhetorical device utilized both literally and figuratively in order to bolster Wagner's claims towards totality:

This historical problematic coincided to a remarkable degree with the central tenets of Wagner's erotic philosophy: the arts were to be brought together in order to address the social alienation of modern man; their fusion would reunite the subject with its cosmos, and would separate the total work of art from the compartmentalized and anomic everyday world. (*Tristan's Shadow* 12-13)

Here it is of great importance to understand that, for Wagner, eroticism's fusional powers can not only remedy increasing feelings of isolation in the modern urbanized world, but also make our bodies—not the intellect—cognizant of “das Mächtige der Lebenstrieb; er ist die unwiderstehliche Kraft (...) die das, was da ist, erst hervorgerufen haben (83) / the “life-force (...) that first called into being all existence” (27). In other words, the awakening of the sexual impulse through calculated titillation within the safe confines of the theater can enable art to serve the same function as religion, providing listeners with intuitive knowledge of their origins.

For fin-de-siècle French writers, who had been educated by positivists and felt their national identity challenged by the profound changes undergone by France in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, Wagner's religious pretensions and his appeal to restore a defunct world order with his art were intensely tantalizing.³ There was a disillusioned but equally nostalgic generation, best encapsulated in the following sentences from an article by Anatole France entitled “Pourquoi sommes-nous tristes ?”: “Nous avons mangé les fruits de l'arbre de la science et il nous est resté dans la bouche un goût de cendre. (...) Le plus grand mal, c'est qu'avec la bonne ignorance, la foi s'en est allée” (*Le Temps* March 31, 1889). If Wagner had struggled to make an impact on the Parisian intelligentsia of the 1860s, the changed cultural context of the

³ On the vague ideological nature of fin-de-siècle pessimism and the special moral mission of the arts in this cultural context, see Valérie Michelet-Jacquod: “L'art est appelé à apaiser le malaise d'une société prise de vertige, mais encore faut-il s'entendre sur la nature du vertige pour comprendre comment l'art peut y remédier” (*Le Roman symboliste* 97).

1880s was a lot more favorable to his ideas because of a generational yearning for a counterargument to positivism.

More than thirty years after Wagner had laid out his aesthetic philosophy in his Zürich writings, *La Revue wagnérienne* proposed not only to take stock of his most important ideas, but also to sow its seeds in a yet hostile French cultural landscape. Although scholars such as Cécile Leblanc have already underlined the *Revue's* critical role in evangelizing the French through its translations of hitherto unavailable Wagnerian texts, they tend to attribute the special zeal of its contributors—and their eventual success in convincing their compatriots—to the idealistic *Zeitgeist* of the 1880s: “cette réflexion sur la création contemporaine coïncide avec les recherches de ceux que l'on appellera les symbolistes, sur les rapports de la poésie et de la musique (...) Wagner semblait apporter ses réponses et le modèle d'une œuvre totale, synthétique et idéale” (22). By contrast, what they do not seem to consider is that part of the Symbolist/Decadent affinity for Wagner was rooted in shared aversion for contemporary society, which the *Revue's* editorial line also perceived as decadent albeit for more nebulous reasons than the composer.⁴ In the wake of France's defeat by Prussia in 1871 and its adoption of democracy, the *Revue's* contributors believed that an antidote to the debasement of their country was sorely needed. In the grand Wagnerian tradition, it was up to art to lead this mission of revivification.

This was the exact motivation that prompted the *Revue's* editor, Édouard Dujardin, to write a call to arms in his *chronique* from the June 1885 issue, with a sense of urgency induced by the recent death of Victor Hugo:

⁴ For Wagner, the word *decadence* is frequently associated with the notion of frivolity and the corruption of public taste by unscrupulous composers/theater directors motivated by financial interest. It is also heavily informed by his anti-Semitic worldview, which is apparent in *Religion & Art* (1880), not to mention the infamous *Jewishness in Music* (1850). If a number of Symbolists, including Wyzewa, did indeed share Wagner's anti-Semitism, they were rather more concerned with the loss of Catholic values, which they saw as the consequence of the newly installed democratic regime and the advent of modern science.

Car l'époque, nécessaire, de la synthèse est venue, l'heure où se devait instituer l'œuvre d'art complète, à la fois rationnelle et sensationnelle, fondant, sous une formule dernière, les réalismes de Racine et de Hugo, —et c'est l'époque de Richard Wagner. (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 130)

Yet for all of his familiarity with Wagnerian music, Dujardin was not the providential artistic leader needed by the *Revue* because he only possessed a laborious command of the German language and read Wagner in the text with some difficulty. Furthermore, as a fledgling editor who was running across Paris to make literary alliances and secure wealthy patrons, he lacked the time to delve into the details of the composer's enormous theoretical output, preferring to devote his own creative energies towards fiction. The work of plowing through Wagner's treatises thus had to be delegated to someone else. Although Houston Stewart Chamberlain had often played the role of Dujardin's chosen interlocutor with respect to some of Wagner's more arcane concepts, one could not count on him to attend meetings and dinners in Paris—since he was based in Switzerland and suffered from ill health—nor could he be expected to feel sufficiently confident to publish detailed exegetic articles in French. Another thinker of comparable intellectual stature was sorely needed.

To Dujardin, it quickly became apparent that the Wagnerian philosopher needed by the *Revue* might in fact be his close friend and occasional housemate Teodor de Wyzewa, a talented twenty-two-year-old who had yet to publish anything, but already dazzled his Wagnerite peers with his erudition. In the authoritative study dedicated to Wyzewa's life and works, *Teodor de Wyzewa et le Cosmopolitisme littéraire en France à l'Epoque du Symbolisme* (1967), Paul Delsemme elaborates on the details of Dujardin and Wyzewa's first encounter, which fittingly took place at the theater, sometime in the later part of 1884 while Wyzewa's companion in misfortune,

the cellist and composer Xavier Perreau, was rehearsing an opera by Camille Saint-Saëns called *Étienne Marcel* (1879):

Toléré dans la salle et dans les coulisses, Teodor assistait à toutes les représentations, pour se chauffer. Certain soir qu'il avait pris place aux fauteuils, il se trouva à côté d'Édouard Dujardin dont il avait entendu dire qu'il se proposait de lancer une revue consacrée à l'œuvre wagnérienne. Il l'aborda, ils se plurent. Une amitié venait de naître, qui fut sincère et féconde, mais traversée d'orages. (20)

It is likely that Dujardin, then an obscure music critic for *La Renaissance musicale*, found the young man impressive. Wyzewa was not only extremely well read in foreign literature and philosophy, he was a polyglot who mastered both his native French and Polish, along with Russian, German and English. Furthermore, according to his friend Paul Adam, he was also musically proficient: “Musicien admirable, Wyzewa me jouait au piano les chefs-d’œuvre de Beethoven, de Mozart, de Wagner même, qu’il s’acharna tant à faire connaître dans Paris, dès 1884” (*L’Information*, May 21, 1917). Although his gifts were awe-inspiring, and may have convinced Dujardin he was in the presence of a kindred spirit, it should be noted that their seven-year-long collaboration—from the *Revue wagnérienne* to the *Revue indépendante* where Wyzewa was entrusted by Dujardin to be the *de facto* editor in his absence during the year 1887—was tainted by rivalry and personal quarrels.⁵

⁵ As testament to the volatility of their rapport, one could quote numerous examples from the letters kept in Dujardin's personal papers, including this charming note from Wyzewa—chronologically the very first letter from the archive—that hints at such competitiveness through its use of combat imagery: “Pare, comme il te plaira, le coup terrible que je t’envoie sous la forme de cette invitation” (Letter from March 21, 1885. Folder 91.6, HRC). The exact reason behind the two friends' eventual falling-out is difficult to pinpoint. Several letters kept at the Harry Ransom Center testify to the tempestuous nature of the friendship, oftentimes with Wyzewa feeling humiliated because he borrowed money from Dujardin and had to rely on his hospitality. However, it seems as if it were a quarrel over a woman—with Dujardin commencing an affair with the dancer Jane Avril in 1892 in spite of Wyzewa's feelings for her—that soured the relationship for good. One acrimonious letter from January 22nd, 1893 seems to confirm Wyzewa's resentment and sees him apologize for having viciously spread rumors that Dujardin suffered from a venereal disease, “la vérole,” as a form of retribution. (HRC Folder 91.6)

It should be noted that in contrast with Dujardin, Wyzewa never worked as a proper music critic and it is rather unclear when and how he came to appreciate Wagnerian music. Retracing the chronology of Wyzewa's Wagnerism is thereby a rather unfeasible critical endeavor, with only a few words from an 1897 conference—actually dedicated to Mozart, the subject of a future multi-volume biography—hinting at the fact that his interest began at a young age:

Wagner ! Je ne puis entendre une phrase de sa musique, je ne puis entendre son nom sans qu'aussitôt, je me revoie, petit collégien en livrée, frémissant d'impatience, la semaine entière sur les bancs de Sainte-Barbe, dans l'attente du bienheureux dimanche, où, après d'interminables stations dans les corridors du Cirque d'Hiver, il me serait donné de réentendre, de savourer avec des délices éperdues, et d'applaudir et d'acclamer, seul au besoin contre une foule imbécile, le Chœur des Fiançailles de *Lohengrin* ou la Marche de *Tannhaeuser*. Et je me revois ensuite, plus vieux de quelques années, parcourant l'Allemagne dans de sinistres trains-omnibus, allant de Leipzig à Francfort et de Cologne à Munich, pour me pâmer aux pâmoisons de Tristan ou pour pleurer d'angoisse aux déceptions de Brunhilde. Et c'est enfin Bayreuth, la colline sacrée. (*Beethoven et Wagner* 241)

This belated story, told with a distinctive mixture of exaltation and irony, is structured along the lines of a neat progression typical of other young Wagnerites from the 1880s. It begins during Wyzewa's student days in Paris, with an allusion to performances of orchestral excerpts at the Cirque d'Hiver, an unpretentious venue attended by a popular audience, followed by a couple of trips to Germany during which he was treated to "the real thing," that is, complete executions sung in German with costumes and sets, before graduating to actual pilgrimages to Bayreuth. Such practical knowledge of Wagner was still uncommon at the time and was enough of a qualifier to warrant Wyzewa's participation in the *Revue wagnérienne*, his aristocratic name and self-assured tone conveniently concealing his lack of credentials and mysterious background.

Born Teodor Wyzewski in Podolia in 1863, he was removed from his own prelapsarian world, the village of Żwaniec (modern-day Ukraine) at the age of six in order to resettle in northern France with his family. This fateful decision was made by his Francophile father, a doctor by

profession, who had been educated in France and desired a better upbringing for his only son. Sadly, the Wyzewskis' lifelong exile was far from felicitous; living in hardship and isolation, they never enjoyed the same privileges and comfort they possessed back in Poland, their loss of social status being most apparent in the abasement of Wyzewa's paternal aunt, Vincentine Bobrowicz, who became the house servant. Like many immigrant families, most of their meager financial resources were almost exclusively directed at their son who represented their hope for assimilation. Yet in spite of early academic distinctions, a bachelor's degree in philosophy and some teaching experience, the young Teodor struggled to make ends meet as a budding intellectual in Paris. It took until the 1890s for him to be able to find a stable position as a foreign literature reviewer for such distinguished newspapers as *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, *La Revue Bleue* and *Le Temps*.

By the early 1900s, a time that coincided with the untimely death of his wife, Marguerite, it became apparent just how much of Wyzewa's thought was influenced by a nostalgic outlook on the past, a trait that earned him the reputation of being reactionary.⁶ Here I would like to specify that I use the word "nostalgic" in its etymological sense, as a compound word made of the Greek *nostos* (home/return home) and *algos* (pain). Nostalgia for Wyzewa, therefore, takes the form of an ideology rooted in homesickness, an existential anguish caused by his having undergone forceful geographical and cultural displacement as a youth. Fantasies of rightful restoration—be it geographical, temporal or ideological—are the corollary of such a perception of self, with Wyzewa manifesting a lifelong longing to be reintegrated into his birth country, itself the object of partitions and occupation from foreign powers since the late 18th century, while adhering to a heavily

⁶ Valérie Michelet-Jacquod states that the preface to the compilation of articles, *Nos Maîtres* (1895), marked a turning point for Wyzewa who reinvented himself as a conservative specialist of foreign literature and thus antagonized his former Symbolist colleagues to the point of no return: "L'évolution précoce de Wyzewa vers un anti-intellectualisme d'obédience chrétienne déclenche un sentiment très net, chez ses compagnons symbolistes, de trahison intellectuelle" (*Valbert* 21).

romanticized view of the past. Although a late 19th-century intellectual, Wyzewa was thus very much indebted to 18th-century idealism and held on to a concept of Polish identity from that same era, one that conveniently ignored the 1795 demise of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth.⁷ A similar type of nostalgia is visible in Wagner's attachment for the Middle Ages, a time period idealized by the German Romantics as an example of bygone German unity that should be recaptured in modern times.⁸

Another point of comparison between Wagner and Wyzewa lies in the regular presence of images of primordial paradise, former unity and accidental ruptures. Incidentally, in Wyzewa's prose, these themes are often intertwined with Wagnerian references, as this excerpt from *Ma Tante Vincentine* (1913)—a hagiographic book dedicated to the memory of his recently deceased aunt—would attest:

il ne me reste plus qu'à raconter ce que je me rappelle de la manière dont on a brusquement fini, comme un vrai rêve de dormeur qu'on éveille, la douce et charmante période de notre séjour à Żwaniec, - dans ce jardin merveilleux, en terrasse au bord du Dniester, où les contes de fées de ma tante semblaient jaillir du sol, tomber sur moi des arbres avec un adorable parfum printanier, et s'entremêler mystérieusement aux simples notions d'histoire nationale ou de français que m'enseignait ma mère. Oui, j'étais, à mon tour, un petit prince de contes de fées. (...) Et puis, tout d'un coup, l'enchantement a cessé. Je me suis trouvé transporté au milieu d'un désert, comme le jeune Parsifal après le baiser de Kundry ; et l'un des phénomènes les plus étranges de ce brusque changement de décor a été, comme j'aurai à le noter bientôt, la transformation instantanée, inexplicable, qui s'est produite dans l'apparence extérieure et dans tout le rôle social de ma tante. (*Ma Tante Vincentine* 81-82)

Every element in this quotation seems to be taken out of a fairy tale, with its characteristic oscillation between magical and nightmarish events. Symptomatic of this dream logic is the incomplete description of the final scene from the second act of *Parsifal*, a quick summary of

⁷ As Paul Delsemme has noted, Wyzewa was suspiciously pro-Russian throughout his career, seemingly denying the fact that the occupation of his birth region, Podolia, by the Russians was resented by the Polish diaspora in Paris: "il se rapprocha toujours davantage de ses compatriotes, sans cesser pour autant d'admirer le génie russe et de se placer au-dessus des discordes de la famille slave" (88).

⁸ Most of Wagner's mature works from *Tannhäuser* onward take place in the medieval era.

which might be rather useful for my reading of this passage. In the wake of Kundry's kiss, Parsifal rejects the temptress sexually, thus overcoming the obstacle set by her master, the sorcerer Klingsor, in order to thwart his redemptive mission. At the close of act II, the irate magician throws the Holy Lance he had stolen from the Grail Knights at Parsifal in hopes of wounding him, like he did with Amfortas. But the spear stops midair and Parsifal succeeds in catching it before using it to make the sign of the cross. This metaphorical closing of both Christ and Amfortas's wounds precipitates the fall of Klingsor's illusory castle and the withering of his garden into a desert.

If Wyzewa's remembrance of *Parsifal* is indeed a bit shaky—after all, he seems to have forgotten about Klingsor's presence altogether—I do not share Michał Mrozowski's matter-of-fact sentiments in questioning the extent of Wyzewa's Wagnerian knowledge because of this one inaccuracy: “La comparaison est tout à fait erronée : le jardin magique de Klingsor est un jardin maudit, qui, par conséquent, n'a rien à voir avec le paradis perdu par Teodor en 1869. En plus, ce n'est pas le baiser de Kundry qui fait disparaître le jardin magique...” (*Richard Wagner et sa réception en France* 382). Rather, I take Wyzewa's unconventional reminiscence of *Parsifal* to be a willful distortion of the source material signaling just how much he was willing to appropriate and reinvent Wagnerian images. In the case of this excerpt, the emphasis on the nefarious powers of Kundry's kiss has more to do with fin-de-siècle paranoia with respect to sexuality than with Wagner, while the conflation of the Polish paradise lost with Klingsor's world of mirrors points to the author's inability to feel at home among Polish people as an adult.⁹ Moreover, I would like to contend that the utopian picture of Poland presented here embodies an essential paradigm for Wyzewa's oeuvre: be it France, women, democracy, literature, or Wagnerian art, none of these

⁹ In a cultural context that was largely unfavorable to women—due in part to a growing pan-European women's rights movement and a spike in sexually transmitted infections like syphilis—Wyzewa's Kundry embodies yet another variation on the *femme fatale* trope in the mold of the ubiquitous figure of Salome, the castrating woman *par excellence*, who made regular appearances in texts by Flaubert, Huysmans, Wilde and Laforgue.

things could ever measure up to the wonders of his imagined view of a glorious past. In face of his dissatisfaction with modern society, he resorted to extreme idealism and irony, cultivating a disenchanted persona reminiscent of Goncharov's Oblomov.¹⁰

All his life, Wyzewa saw himself as a Slav in exile, a “déraciné” condemned to be misunderstood by his French colleagues when he was not the target of xenophobic comments.¹¹ One idea I would like to propose is that Wyzewa's self-perception as a perpetual foreigner may have colored his idiosyncratic reception of Wagner in ways that are hardly tangible, but helped distinguish him from his colleagues of the *Revue wagnérienne*. If drawing such a conclusion solely on the basis of Wyzewa's biography may seem a bit too convenient, it is important to stress that, with Wyzewa, the boundaries of personal life and literature are constantly blurred, his fiction relying heavily on the autobiographical.

In spite of his crucial role in furthering the French Wagnerian movement of the 1880s, Wyzewa's output has been dramatically understudied, especially so in Anglophone criticism where the only study beside my own, Elga Liverman Duval's *Teodor de Wyzewa: Critic Without a Country* (1961), was published more than fifty years ago. If Wyzewa's name ever appears, it is to be found in specialized studies devoted to French Symbolism, as the man who gave Dujardin the recipe for the invention of interior monologue in *Les Lauriers sont coupés*. Strangely enough given the significance of his poetics, Wyzewa's fiction remains vastly ignored despite its evident

¹⁰ In a merciless passage from his memoirs, *De mon temps* (1933), the Symbolist poet Henri de Régnier called Wyzewa an “Oblomoviste montmartrais,” depicting him as a sluggard, a character flaw Wyzewa lamented about himself in spite of all evidence to the contrary: “Cette allusion au roman russe Oblomoff, dont le héros passe ses journées couché sur son poêle, dans une paresse fataliste et un slavisme indolent, nous renseigne sur l'existence que menait, en ces années, le jeune lettré polonais” (107).

¹¹ At the Collège de Beauvais where he studied as an adolescent, the young Wyzewski was mercilessly victimized by pupils and teachers alike because of his foreign-sounding last name. His chief tormentor was the principal: “Il allait jusqu'à m'appeler “Crapulofski”, ou encore “Coquinski”, entièrement indifférent à ce que de telles déformations de mon nom avaient d'injurieux pour toute ma famille” (*Ma Tante Vincentine* 191). Later in life Wyzewa was the frequent target of the nationalistic writer, Charles Maurras, in several vehement book reviews.

merits, even by specialists of fin-de-siècle French literature. Notable exceptions are Paul Delsemme and more recently Michał Mrozowski who was the first scholar to choose Wyzewa's Wagnerism as a point of focus, but admitted not wanting to delve into the fiction beyond discernable Wagnerian allusions (394). Although Delsemme's study should be considered a seminal work in the reception of Wyzewa and includes valid discussions of his novels, Valérie Michelet-Jacquod—with her 2009 critical edition of the novel *Valbert* (1893)—was the first to pursue a comparative approach between the Polish-born critic and his Symbolist contemporaries:

Valbert s'imposerait alors comme l'un des modèles les plus aboutis d'une poétique de l'extrême conscience, largement partagée par les symbolistes, et poursuit le travail ironique d'un Gourmont ou d'un Gide, qui tous deux s'interrogent sur l'existence possible d'un roman de la vie cérébrale. (*Valbert* 8-9)

The purpose of this chapter will be to trace the vicissitudes of Wyzewa's long-term relationship to Wagner, one that wavered between reverence and disillusionment. It is in large part thanks to Wyzewa's theoretical intervention, I contend, that French Wagnerism performed a thorough reinterpretation of Wagner's most important aesthetic ideas and thus forged a path ahead for modernist art and literature. Hence, the presence of Wyzewa at the end of this dissertation is not incidental: he was the most critical of all the writers belonging in this corpus and enjoyed a certain level of hermeneutic freedom of Wagnerian texts and ideas reminiscent of his elders—Mendès and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam—, with the added bonus of his regular frequentation of Bayreuth and a reading knowledge of German. But unlike him, Mendès, Villiers or Dujardin never professed having completely renounced their Wagnerism and none of them were ever accused by critics of knowing Wagner insufficiently well or of having been an insincere Wagnerite.¹² In short, for all of

¹² If Catulle Mendès and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam did feel conflicted about the person of Wagner and his brazen anti-French statements emitted during and after the Franco-Prussian war, they were still lifelong admirers of his music. As for Dujardin, although his devotion to the Wagnerian cause faltered by the 1890s, he still showed the desire, as late as 1947, to have been chosen by the composer as his disciple, writing what I take to be an apocryphal Bayreuthian anecdote from 1882, the year of *Parsifal*'s world premiere: "Un hasard providentiel voulut qu'il traversât, toujours en

his connections with famous Wagnerians, Wyzewa stands as somewhat of an enigma and a rather appropriate image for French Wagnerism as a whole: neither believer nor apostate of the Wagnerian faith, but somewhere in between.

Although I aim to take previous scholarship by Delsemme, Michelet-Jacquod and Mrozowski into account, my intent is to go beyond the question of whether or not Wyzewa was a devoted Wagnerite, or even a true Symbolist for that matter, in order to propose another angle altogether and examine the Wagnerian problem through a more ethical lens. In Wyzewa's eyes, Wagnerian drama, especially so in the case of *Parsifal*, represented an attempt at realizing the regenerative project outlined by Wagner in *Religion and Art* “über die rohe Bewegung der rastlos sich zerstörenden Willenskräfte der Geschichte” (*Gesammelte Schriften* X 296) / against “the restless self-destroying forces of the Will of History” (230). In short, he considered Wagnerian works to be singular aesthetic objects because of their cathartic possibilities; through their truthful depictions of complex characters they are able to arouse empathy in the listener and thus steer the course of their lives away from self-interest. Their greatest accomplishment may in fact be a religious one: the creation of a collective of believers organized in a “cult” centered on self-improvement and compassion towards others, a characteristic shared with Tolstoyism, a doctrine that intrigued Wyzewa later in life. But, as we shall see later in this chapter, Wyzewa felt profoundly ambivalent with regard to Wagnerian music drama's true healing powers and kept on questioning its moral scope throughout his career.

This chapter shall unfold in two parts with the first one being devoted to Wagnerian drama's ability to create the illusion of complete—that is inner and outer—life and thus generate

courant, le couloir qui reliait la scène à la salle où j'étais allé retrouver madame Wagner. Celle-ci dit mon nom à son mari, et, comme je m'étais mis à genoux devant lui, j'entendis encore sa voix qui disait, tandis qu'il me prenait les deux mains : ‘Tuchartin... Tuchartin... bon ami’” (“Le Cas Frederick Nietzsche” Unpublished document. HRC. Box 1. Folder 9-11).

the conditions necessary for empathy. Through a process of emotional identification, individual Wagnerian characters guide the listener towards an intuition of their place in the world, reportedly affecting their existence outside of the bounds of the concert hall. I shall argue that Wyzewa aimed for a similar kind of metaphysical revelation in his articles for the *Revue wagnérienne*, where he urged Wagnerite writers to convey the impression of life—via the illusion of temporal continuity and the scrupulous transposition of thought patterns—within the pages of their future Wagnerian novels.¹³ In the second part, I will develop a detailed analysis of *Valbert* (1893), a novel that marked Wyzewa's transition into anti-intellectualism and showed the extent of his dissatisfaction with Wagnerian art. I contend that the constant presence of *Parsifal* in the text stands as a representation of Wyzewa's inner contradictions with respect to Wagner: on the one hand, he admired the work because of its religious ambitions, on the other he saw it as impure since it still indulged in emotional manipulation and contributed to the self-glorification of its creator. In conclusion, this chapter seeks to document the pivotal moment during which Wagner-inspired artistic audacity was progressively shunned for immediacy and simpler virtues, like comfort and authenticity, both of which became increasingly urgent at a time of revived tensions with Germany in pre-First World War France.

Let me begin with a quick dive into textual analysis as a means of illustrating how the *Gesamtkunstwerk* model was perceived by Wagnerites to be successful at conveying the impression of *total* life for its characters and was therefore an alluring format for writers obsessed with multidimensional depictions of human psychology. The excerpt I have chosen hails from Wyzewa's series of three articles dedicated to the theorization of French Wagnerian art, all of

¹³ Here I would like to stress that I am using the term “Wagnerian” not thematically, but rather as a set of aesthetic criteria defined by Wyzewa in his 1886 Wagnerian article trilogy for the *Revue wagnérienne*.

which appeared in the summer of 1886 in the *Revue* and were instrumental in shaping the ethos of the nascent Symbolist movement.¹⁴ Under Wyzewa's guidance, the three Wagnerian sisters mentioned in *The Artwork of the Future* were channeled into a new aesthetic trinity better suited for the post-Romantic French cultural context: music, literature and painting, each one of them being dedicated their own article. This triptych, I would like to suggest, was symptomatic of Wyzewa's constant redefinition of the Wagnerian model, having effectively displaced the possibility of artistic synthesis from the realm of the performing arts to more traditional media meant for individual consumption.¹⁵ In so doing, Wyzewa may have harkened back to eighteenth-century aesthetics instead of remaining faithful to Wagnerian theory, the three arts he selected being reminiscent of the ones at the top of Hegel's hierarchical five art-system, with literature—more specifically, the “Wagnerian” novel—replacing poetry as the art form most removed from base materiality.¹⁶

Unsurprisingly, out of the three essays it is the one dedicated to the creation of Wagnerian literature that is the most developed and rich in suggestions for fellow *littérateurs*.¹⁷ In contrast with the other two articles, it begins with an opening anecdote, a rewriting of a popular Hellenic allegorical tale from Xenophon's *Memorabilia*—itself based on a composition by the sophist

¹⁴ Hereafter, they shall be referred to as the “Wagnerian Art trilogy.”

¹⁵ For Wyzewa, music is the most sophisticated of art forms because it translates “le fond émotionnel de l'âme” into a more palatable form (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 261). This highly intimate and subjective, not to say secretive, vision of music helps explain his lifelong predilection for chamber music over popular entertainment à la *Offenbach*.

¹⁶ In ascending order of idealizing interiorization, we have: 1) architecture, 2) sculpture, 3) painting, 4) music and 5) poetry. See *Aesthetics Lectures on Fine Art II*: “Diese fünf Künste bilden das in sich selbst bestimmte und gegliederte System der realen wirklichen Kunst. Außer ihnen gibt es freilich noch andere unvollkommene Künste, Gartenbaukunst, Tanz usw., deren wir jedoch nur gelegentlich werden Erwähnung tun können” (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* 708) / “These five arts make up the inherently determinate and articulated system of what art actually is in both essence and reality. It is true that outside them there are other imperfect arts, such as gardening, dancing, etc., which however we can only mention in passing” (627).

¹⁷ Critics like Cécile Leblanc and Jean-Nicolas Illouz have designated this text as a founding aesthetic treatise of Symbolism: “Cet article de Wyzewa pourrait donc apparaître comme un manifeste, un programme de la littérature wagnérienne, programme que s'efforcera de respecter point par point Édouard Dujardin en publiant *Les Lauriers sont coupés...*” (*Wagnérisme et création* 264).

Prodicus—, which features the Greek hero Heracles.¹⁸ However, before the story proper is set to begin, the reader is subtly forewarned by a rather incongruous epigraph that he/she may not be in the presence of a deferential homage to the wisdom of Socrates, but rather of a somewhat comical tale: “La valeur absolue d'une œuvre esthétique est, toujours, EN RAISON INVERSE du nombre des esprits qui peuvent la comprendre” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 150). Here Wyzewa's use of mock mathematical jargon—a marker of academic seriousness if ever there was one—and capital letters verges on the parodic, an impression further confirmed by the implication that the quotation stems from proverbial hearsay: “Proposition évidente et rigoureuse, peut-être vraie” (Idem). A characteristically fin-de-siècle self-deprecating tone is thus established, heralding Heracles's rather unremarkable entrance in the very first sentence: “On raconte que le jeune Hercule, en un temps sans doute fort lointain, allait, souriant et robuste, par les campagnes bleues du royaume de Mythologie” (Ibid.). Such an attitude is not just carefree, it is oblivious enough to warrant a comparison between this version of Heracles and other Symbolist protagonists, like Daniel Prince.

As expected, we are rapidly informed that the hitherto nonchalant Heracles is facing a peripeteia in the form of a tough dilemma: having just come across two women at a crossroads, fate dictates he must lose his virginity and choose “l'immuable fiancée de sa virilité prochaine” (Ibid.). These charming creatures in fact embody contrasting ideals: the first one, the blonde Virtue, offers to lead him to combat “aux lieux cruels hantés par les hydres” before bestowing her sensual reward upon him (“la victoire des luttes, les fatigues mortelles qui glorifient”), while the second, the dark-haired Joy,—another deviation from the original where she is known as Vice—promises to initiate him sexually without *quid pro quo*: “les tendresses parfumées, la [sic] délice des longues nuits, comment les âmes se courroucent en de tumultueux frissons et les hurlements

¹⁸ Here it might be useful to specify that *Memorabilia* is the only work besides Plato's dialogues to feature Socrates as seen through the eyes of one of his disciples.

éperdus d'un bonheur qui angoisse, et les sommeils tranquilles, après la tourmente" (Ibid.). One represents toil, be it physical or aesthetic—by which I mean the kind of labor required in order to appreciate most Symbolist poetry, or for that matter, the *Ring* cycle—the other, immediate gratification.

As it happens, in a rather flippant nod to Wagner, Heracles is designated as a Mediterranean version of Siegfried stemming from “des légendes plus lascives.” Being a primitive hero from a bygone age, he does not understand the necessity to exclude either woman from future embraces. In other words, he sees monogamy as a cultural convention and is aware that many species in the natural world do not abide by that norm. When pressed to come to a resolution, he launches into a speech underscoring his own conflict between nature (relative sexual freedom) and culture (monogamy), suggesting that he, the undecided bystander *par excellence*, could solve the issue by uncovering a third way:

Hélas, je n'ai point appris les subtils symbolismes, à l'école d'où je viens. Seriez-vous, de charmes si divers, la Vertu et la Joie ? N'est-ce donc point même chose, la Vertu et la Joie ? Et si j'ai vertueusement occis, tout à l'heure, sur ma route, quelques méchants lions et un peu de brigands, était-ce par une autre raison que par le plaisir même d'exercer bien mes muscles ? Allez, vos formes sont trop belles pour vêtir des métaphysiques ! Puis je ne sais pas choisir : et pourquoi ? Mais plutôt je veux vous voir toujours l'une et l'autre, car vous êtes gracieuses ainsi que des amantes, et j'aime les onduleuses musiques de vos voix. (151)

If the first sentence, in particular, is ripe with literary allusions, it is certainly not a coincidence. Rather appropriately for an article dedicated to “Wagnerian literature,” this quotation can be read like a *roman à clef* with Wyzewa, the budding writer, taking on the guise of the naïve Heracles. His own artistic dilemma involves opting for a career as an avant-garde fiction writer/poet, a position that would require proof of his stylistic mastery—“les subtils symbolismes”—at the expense of more pellucid prose in the vein of the Polish folk stories and Biblical tales with which

he was raised.¹⁹ Knowing that settling on one approach/woman would imply the sacrifice of another part of himself, the young author/Heracles is unable to commit: should he determine whether to be a theorist, a poet, or a popular storyteller? Can one actually dispense with aesthetic binaries, such as obscurity/clarity, inaccessibility/immediacy, Realism/Symbolism? Is there a possibility for a third way in the form of a hybrid text that would cater to all of these creative impulses at once?

In this light, the delicate balancing act accomplished by Heracles between both women emerges as a paradigmatic example of triumphant fusion, echoing Wagnerian drama. Therefore, at the end of the anecdote, the presence of Wagner comes as no surprise; the parallel being in fact expected by the reader:

Richard Wagner eut la gloire de refuser un pareil choix : nous le vénérons surtout parce qu'il a compris l'intime parenté des formes artistiques, et parce qu'il a tenté la restituer [sic]. Il a vu que les peintres, et les littérateurs, et les musiciens, exerçaient, avec une égale noblesse, les modes divers d'une tâche commune. Par lui, l'Art n'est plus dans la peinture, ni dans la littérature, ni dans la musique, mais dans l'union de ces genres, et dans la vie totale qui en naît. (151-152)

If the cryptic expression, “l'intime parenté,” is fairly typical of Wyzewa's “don de la formule,” it is also representative of his absorption of Wagnerian theory and his regurgitation of it in the form of evocative assemblages. In this particular case, Wyzewa may have been referring to the idea of a primordial kinship between art forms, which becomes apparent once they are pushed to their limits.

¹⁹ See the following passage from *Ma Tante Vincentine* as proof of the impact of Vincentine's tales on the young Wyzewa's imagination: “Ce sont eux, ces contes de mon enfance, qui m'ont enseigné à admettre la possibilité des choses impossibles, à me défier de toute prétendue science imposant des limites arbitraires aux faits sous prétexte de “lois”, et à tenir pour étrangement incomplète et indigente (...) la réalité de nos sensations présentes en regard de celle de nos libres rêves” (*Ma Tante Vincentine* 73). The excerpt is also symptomatic of the connection Wyzewa made between his enjoyment of folk narratives as a child and his intellectual opposition to rationalism as an adult.

Indeed, according to Wagner, at the zenith of its powers, poetry loses touch with semantics in order to become a collection of pleasing sounds while dramatic music becomes saturated with plot, emotions and other extra-musical concerns, each appropriating distinctive traits belonging to the other. Consider, for instance, this passage from *Lettre sur la musique*: “Arrivé là, il me sembla voir clairement que chaque art demande, dès qu’il est aux limites de sa puissance, à donner la main à l’art voisin; et, en vue de mon idéal, je trouvai un vif intérêt à suivre cette tendance dans chaque art particulier; il me parut que je pouvais la démontrer de la manière la plus frappante dans les rapports de la poésie à la musique...” (184). It is therefore no coincidence that to these artistic extremes—or “l’union de ces genres”—corresponds an equally transgressive sexual model, namely the incestuous pairing of Sieglinde and Siegmund, forming a reincarnated Platonic hermaphrodite once they capitulate to their attraction for one another. Their offspring, Siegfried, the freest man of the *Ring* cycle, does embody the “vie totale” as the perfect sum of his perfectly well-assorted parents.

However, in Wyzewa’s world, “l’union de ces genres” takes a subtly different form than in Wagnerian music drama. To be precise, if we are to consider Heracles as the embodiment of artistic synthesis, it should be noted that unlike Siegmund, he does not mate with his *alter ego*, instead he does exactly the opposite by renouncing lovemaking altogether. Yet upon his sexual abstention comes the opportunity for another form of union based on words, physical proximity and visuals: “On raconte qu’il les fit s’asseoir, auprès de lui; longuement il leur murmurait des paroles caressantes, tandis que les baignait l’harmonieuse ténèbre [sic] d’une nuit royale” (151). And yet, although Heracles has rejected the likelihood of ever bedding one of these women, he has brought forth the possibility for *Aufhebung* in an alternative space where both Joy and Virtue shall participate in an intricate game of everlasting foreplay with him.

Inasmuch as this synthetic model may be reminiscent of Wagner's three sisters, it proposes minor variations to the Wagnerian model, much like Wyzewa's recollection of the events of act II of *Parsifal* in *Ma Tante Vincentine*. Beyond the obvious fact that Wyzewa's eroticism proves to be rather more demure than Wagner's, it is important to stress that for him, artistic synthesis is a sensual, not sexual, process. If this seems like a rather slight alteration, it does in fact bear consequences that shall become clearer in the course of this chapter. But for now, suffice it to say that for Wyzewa the "sensual totality" is just as capable of producing this elusive feeling of "vie totale" in the reader or spectator as its sexual counterpart in Wagner.

Having established that the modalities of synthesis are different for both Wagner and Wyzewa, I believe it would be helpful to further investigate the rather enigmatic nature of the impression of "vie totale" imparted by the Wagnerian artwork on the spectator. This fascination with the feeling of life and its tight relation with the aesthetic experience was a regular obsession in Wyzewa's Wagnerian writings, and one that needs to be thoroughly analyzed in order to uncover just how unorthodox his Wagnerian exegeses were. So constant was Wyzewa's fixation with the illusion of life that it appears from the very beginning of his involvement with the *Revue wagnérienne*, in the third issue of April 1885, where he wrote a line whose substance remained true in later articles from the *Revue wagnérienne* and, to some extent, the *Revue indépendante*: "Mais Wagner n'est pas un musicien, il est un dramaturge, voulant produire la vie entière, non telle ou telle émotion" (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 76).²⁰ Thus the equation is posed: drama means the reproduction of complete life on stage; life is the subject of drama.

²⁰ Wyzewa's involvement with *La Revue indépendante* began in November 1886, but came to an abrupt end by December 1887 when Gustave Kahn took over as the *de facto* editor at the request of Dujardin. Delsemme even sees Wyzewa's departure from the *Revue indépendante* as the moment during which he effectively renounced Symbolism: "En 1888, Wyzewa ne figurait plus au sommaire. Dès lors, il ne cessa de se détacher, lentement, du Symbolisme" (38).

The Impossible Lure of Lifelike Art

If it is customary for music critics to write of a “lively violin line” with respect to a Mozart symphony or of an “animated movement” vis-à-vis the scherzo of a Beethoven string quartet, it is rather unusual for them to discuss the “lifelike” quality of operatic works outside of the realm of voice. The representation of life at the opera house, it is commonly believed, is a highly subjective affair brought about by the special vocal and acting talents of star singers and our neurological responses to the extraordinary sounds they emit.²¹ It is seen first and foremost as an exclusively acoustic phenomenon, and one that can move concert-goers to tears because of the extreme vocal and emotional demands made on singers.²² According to opera lovers, like Wayne Kostenbaum, the operatic voice itself is capable of conveying the distilled essence of life because its primary function is to enhance everyday speech and breathing to monumental proportions: “Her voice [Anna Moffo's in *Madama Butterfly*] (...) seemed not a copy of life, but life itself, and, like a breathing property, it entered my system with a vector so naïve, unadulterated, and elemental (...) that my drab bedroom shifted on its axis” (*The Queen's Throat* 10). The voice, therefore, reigns supreme and it is only seldom that emotional identification with the situations depicted in the libretto, or with the stage director's use of historical and cultural references, is invoked as part of the illusion of “life itself” unfolding on the stage. Consequently, if the impression of life in opera is only due to a purely physical reaction to overtones, it is possible to wonder why Wagner would

²¹ As a matter of example, see this full-throated endorsement of the 19th-century coloratura soprano, Adelina Patti, by an enthusiastic reviewer, where the special qualities of her voice are depicted as especially alive in implicit opposition to everyday singing: “Le talent de la Patti est vivant, et voilà pourquoi le public s'y laisse prendre, sans permettre aux savantesses de prouver ou de nier son plaisir” (*Le Figaro* December 18, 1866).

²² On the psychological effects of music on the listener, see for instance this passage from Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings*: “When Orfeo or Otello sings, for instance, we grasp not only the meanings of his texts (...) but also another dimension in addition to the words, which is understood to be the character's subjective feelings. The music delivers a sense of depth and grants the spectator license to eavesdrop upon the character's interiority” (85).

be deemed to be more effective than Puccini or Gounod in this area and also why his works were singled out by Wyzewa as particularly lifelike.

In order to understand how Wyzewa may have derived such an interpretation of Wagnerian music drama, it is helpful to examine the context in which these works first appeared and how they defined themselves as vibrant representations of the “purely human” as opposed to dead-on-arrival national traditions like *grand opéra* and Italian Romantic opera. The dichotomy of Wagnerian art vs. dead opera is in fact located in Wagnerian theoretical texts.²³ During the late 1840s, Wagner found himself in the position of having to theorize how he was to give life to his vision of the “artwork of the future” before he was able to secure the financial means to confront his ideas with the contingent reality of the theater. Likely owing to the influence of Bakunin, a personal acquaintance during the Dresden years, as well as the French socialist Proudhon whose essay *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété ?* (1840) he had read during a short stay in Paris in 1849, Wagner's treatises of the Zürich years lambast both capitalism and industrialization for their deathly impact on the arts.²⁴ The 1849 essay, *Art and Revolution*, bears testimony to his vision of modern art as essentially corrupt and advocates the necessity to operate an aesthetic *tabula rasa* based on ethical grounds:

Das ist die Kunst, wie sie jetzt die ganze zivilisierte Welt erfüllt! Ihr wirkliches Wesen ist die Industrie, ihr moralischer Zweck der Gelderwerb, ihr ästhetisches Vorgeben die Unterhaltung der Gelandweilten. Aus dem Herzen unsrer modernen Gesellschaft, aus dem Mittelpunkte ihrer kreisförmigen Bewegung, der Geldspekulation im Großen, saugt unsre Kunst ihren Lebenssaft, erborgt sich eine herzlose Anmut aus den leblosen

²³ Nicholas Vazsonyi insists that Wagner did not try to reform opera, he declared the genre *dead* and operated under a new set of constraints: “Crucial to his national argument was Wagner's contention that ‘opera’—which Meyerbeer ruled—was, from the German perspective, a foreign product. The consistent academic practice of calling Wagner's aesthetic writings from this period ‘Reformschriften’ is thus inappropriate. Wagner did not attempt to ‘reform’ opera at all, because it is both alien to the Germans and a fundamentally flawed aesthetic enterprise (the two are connected). Instead, Wagner declared opera ‘dead’ to make space for something conceptually ‘brand new’: in the long history of attempts at operatic ‘reform,’ this was an unprecedented gesture” (*Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* 89-90).

²⁴ On the impact of Bakunin and Proudhon's anarchism on Wagner, see Mark Berry's *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner's Ring* (32-38).

Überresten mittelalterlich ritterlicher Konvention, und läßt sich von da (...) zu den Tiefen des Proletariats herab, entnervend, entsittlichend, entmenslichend überall, wohin sich das Gift ihres Lebenssaftes ergießt. (*Gesammelte Schriften* III 25)

This is Art, as it now fills the entire civilized world! Its true essence is industry; its moral purpose, the gaining of gold; its aesthetic pretext, the entertainment of the bored. From the heart of our modern society, and the focal point of its circular movement, which is wholesale financial speculation, our art sucks its life-juice, borrows a heartless grace from the lifeless relics of the chivalric conventions of medieval times, and (...) descends to the depths of the proletariat, enervating, demoralizing, and dehumanizing wherever the venom of its lifeblood pours out. (*The Artwork of the Future and Other Works* 42 with my amendments)

What is notable in this vivid denunciation of contemporary society is the nature of the damage inflicted on concert-goers. In Wagner's eyes, the uncritical contemplation of the golden calf effectively pours poison into the bodies of those who are mesmerized by its visual and auditory splendor. Borrowing from the kind of medical discourse that was prevalent at the time—as the mention of nerves would suggest—Wagner decries the parasitic for-profit ethos that drained real art of its “life-juice” and thereby “dehumanized” its participants by turning them into “heartless” and “lifeless” creatures.²⁵

Rhetorically, these organic metaphors reinforce the impression that Wagnerian aesthetics were calibrated in order to face life-or-death stakes in a moment of great crisis. Instead of sucking the life out of its audience, like the popular genre of *opéra bouffe* and the more prestigious *grand opéra* reportedly did, Wagnerian music drama was to give the people an electrifying jolt that would regenerate them and set them back on the right path. It would then ensure their survival as a newly formed community by flooding them with life-giving juice. In short, it was to be an antidote to the venom, a vivifying enterprise that would single-handedly prevent the decomposition of society Wagner believed to be occurring in industrialized Western Europe.

²⁵ It is highly ironic that the same image of pathological/enervating art was used against Wagner by nineteenth-century medical doctors, including the sexologist Krafft-Ebing: “Nervousness and nervous sickness can also be created by straining of the aural nerves” (quoted in *Bad Vibrations* 68).

In the beginning pages of another essay, *A Communication to my Friends* (1851), Wagner made sure to prolong the work begun in previous treatises by defining not just the “artwork of the future,” but also the role of the artist operating under the new musico-dramatic paradigm defined in *Opera and Drama* (1851). It is of particular interest to this chapter, not to say this whole dissertation, that the composer emphatically insisted on the connection between real life and the artwork, in other words, on the artist's engagement with the outside world:

Das, was jene Anlagen einzig zur Erfüllung, jene Keime einzig zur Blüthe bringen kann, —Das also, was das ästhetische Wahngelbilde des absoluten Kunstwerkes ein: für allemal über den Haufen werfen muß, ist der Gewinn der Bedingungen für die vollkommen entsprechende sinnliche Erscheinung des Kunstwerkes aus und vor dem wirklichen Leben. (*Gesammelte Schriften* IV 293)

That which must consequently throw the æsthetic phantasm of the absolute artwork for ever on the dustheap of the ages, is this: the winning of the conditions for the complete and full appearance of the physical artwork amid and from our actual Life. (Idem 275)

Such a statement can be interpreted as an indictment of the tenets of *l'art pour l'art* as epitomized by Théophile Gautier in the preface to his collection, *Émaux et Camées* (1852): “Sans prendre garde à l'ouragan/Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées/Moi j'ai fait *Émaux et Camées*” (6). The formula is clear: if the artist is to conceive of a work that will be “warm-to-the-senses,” he/she needs to remain within the world and not withdraw from it. Consequently, animating one's creation is an action that cannot be performed from inside the ivory tower. It must be done in spiritual and physical collaboration with the audience.

In keeping with Wagner's hubristic ambitions, the artist cannot be merely part of a wider community, he/she should take on the guise of leader. And in order to be recognized as such by his/her peers, he/she has to perform an iconoclastic act that would command their attention, if not their respect. Later, in *A Communication*, Wagner makes this intention clear with an attack on yet another symbol of the triumph of bourgeois culture, public concerts, which he derides as a

“monumental craze” for fetishized cultural artefacts from the recent past.²⁶ The endless repetition of canonical pieces—by then too sanitized and irrelevant for the people to be able to recognize itself in them—was running counter to Wagner's intentions for contemporary art and prompted him to propose instead “Die Vernichtung des Monumentalen mit der Mode zugleich heißt aber: der Eintritt des immer gegenwärtigen, stets neu beziehungsvollen und warm zu empfindenden Kunstwerkes in das Leben (...) als der Gewinn der Bedingungen für dieses Kunstwerk aus dem Leben” (Idem 296) / “the annihilation of the Monumental together with Fashion is, in other terms, the entry upon life of the ever freshly present, ever new-related and warm-to-the-senses Artwork; which, again, is (...) the winning of the conditions for this artwork from Life itself” (Idem 278). Out of the rubbles, fresh new art is free to emerge, ever so anchored in the present reality of immediate human concerns.

The obliteration of former idols is therefore the pre-condition for the act of creation miraculously happening *ex nihilo*, that is, outside of the realm of Western musical tradition. The next few lines further specify the peculiar properties of the new “living” work of art, which is present within the world, as opposed to “dead” traditional art that operates remotely:

daß ferner dieses Drama nur dann dem Leben gegenüber seine richtige Stellung finden dürfte, wenn es in jedem seiner Momente diesem Leben vollständig gegenwärtig, in seinen besondern Beziehungen ihm so angehörig, wie aus ihm hervorgegangen, nach der Individualität des Ortes, der Zeit und die Umstände so eigenthümlich erscheint, daß es zu seinem Verständnisse, d.h. zu seinem Genusse, nicht des reflektirenden Verstandes, sondern des unmittelbar erfassenden Gefühles bedürfe... (Idem)

drama could only find its proper attitude toward Life, when in its every moment it should be completely present with that Life, in its most specific relations so bound therewith and issuing therefrom, in its individuality of time and place and circumstance so characteristic

²⁶ On the increased frequency of public concerts over private ones in the nineteenth century, see Carl Dahlhaus's *Nineteenth-Century Music*: “In den Zeitungen und Zeitschriften wird zwar regelmäßig über öffentliche, aber selten über private Konzerte berichtet. Daß jedoch der Teil der Musikgeschichte, der reicher dokumentiert ist, allein darum auch der wesentlichere sei, ist eine Maxime, die kein Historiker vertreten würde” (*Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts* 40). / “Public concerts are open to all, for a fee, and are also the object of descriptions and reviews in the central public medium of the bourgeoisie, the press. It was here that the emancipated bourgeoisie confirmed in its own eyes its status as the ‘taste-bearing stratum’ in music” (49).

thereof, that for its understanding, i.e., for its enjoyment, there should be no longer need of the reflecting Intellect but only of the directly seizing Feeling... (Idem)

Here the portrait of the artist of the future begins to take shape. Engagement with one's people, by which Wagner always meant the *German* people, is key, and so is the means with which composer and audience must communicate, namely “the directly seizing Feeling.” In actuality, nothing *seizes* the spectator's attention and body like the erotic feeling, with which Wagnerian music is constantly saturated. Once again, eroticism serves as a means of consolidating Wagner's wider philosophical ideas.

Moreover, this paragraph is also noteworthy for the conflict it stages, one between “the reflecting Intellect,” which used to rule the theater, and the use of sensuality in that same space. In this dilemma, the adjective “reflecting” is of great importance, as it alludes to an important Wagnerian theory: the metaphorical mirror he saw as characteristic of the communal religious experience undergone by ancient Greeks in the theatre. As Marc A. Weiner has demonstrated, the specular image in Wagnerian aesthetics was nothing new, rather it was a rechanneling of earlier philosophers, such as Hegel, who had elaborated on the notion of “self-consciousness through mutual recognition” in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, or Feuerbach who used the same concept.²⁷ But the sole projection of the intellect onto the stage does not suffice for the mirroring relationship between spectator and artist to take place. For fear of being elitist and not reaching through the crowd, the composer ought to transpose emotional bits from his/her inner life—to which the eroticism of the “seizing Feeling” seems to allude—into the fabric of the music itself.²⁸

²⁷ After explaining the Hegelian/Feuerbachian influence on the Wagnerian “metaphorical mirror,” Weiner continues: “For Wagner, when the Greek spectators observed the unfolding of a tragic drama, they saw therein a mirror which reflected back to their gaze the ‘essence’ of themselves—and even more important for him—*of their community*” (*Richard Wagner and the anti-Semitic Imagination* 36).

²⁸ Laurence Dreyfus has emphasized how much Wagner seemed to be attached to his pink satin robe while he was composing, as if he were manifesting the feminine part of the self he superstitiously needed to awaken during the moment of creation. (137-143) Incidentally, it was Judith Gautier who was often tasked with purchasing such garments from the finest Parisian stores on behalf of the composer.

If the music is capable of representing subjectivity in its own “linguistic” terms, it nevertheless has to be conveyed in time and space through the bodily vehicle of the singing performer, the perennial instrument of emotion in opera. Once again, art and living bodies collide with one another, giving birth to a pulsating aesthetic object that almost seems to be gifted with a conscience:

So versetzt er durch Schauen und Hören sich gänzlich auf die Bühne; der Darsteller ist Künstler nur durch volles Aufgehen in das Publikum. Alles, was auf der Bühne athmet und sich bewegt, athmet und bewegt sich durch ausdrucksvolles Verlangen nach Mittheilung, nach Angeschaut- Angehörtwerden in jenem Raume, der, bei immer nur verhältnißmäßigem Umfange, vom scenischen Standpunkte aus dem Darsteller doch die gesammte Menschheit zu enthalten dünkt; aus dem Zuschauerraume aber verschwindet das Publikum, dieser Repräsentant des öffentlichen Lebens, sich selbst; es lebt und athmet nur noch in dem Kunstwerke, das ihm das Leben selbst, und auf der Scene, die ihm der Weltraum dünkt. (*Gesammelte Schriften* III 180)

By watching and listening the audience is transplanted onto the stage: the performer is an artist only if he fully merges with the public. All that breathes and moves on the stage is driven by a need to communicate, to be seen and heard in that space which, to however relative a degree, yet from the point of view of the set seems to the performer to contain the whole of humanity: and the audience, that representative of public life, vanishes from the auditorium, it lives and breathes in the artwork, which now seems to be life itself, and on the stage, which now seems to be the whole world. (*The Artwork of the Future* 72)

With the tripartite assemblage of composer, performer and audience members, Wagnerian music drama succeeds in mechanically recreating a multidimensional impression of life, its greatest trick being the ability to make us think that the illusion is real, organic even, all thanks to the interference of living bodies pushed to expressive extremes. Hence the operatic voice is only a contributing factor to the impression of life and does not single-handedly enforce it. Indeed, it is the combination of heightened situations on the stage and the poignant minutiae of the protagonists' psyche—be they Wotan or Isolde—that make these works feel *full of life*, in other words, they embody a surplus, an exaggeration of real-life subjective experience. This particular assemblage and its breathtaking emotional and physical reach is perhaps the reason behind the oft-made

comparison between Wagnerian art and magic, and one of the mysteries Wagnerian commentators—both then and now—have always longed to unravel.

The *Revue wagnérienne*, which was issued at a time of great hostility against German art, was no stranger to posing the question of why Wagner awoke such passionate reactions from musicians and audience members alike. Rather unexpectedly for the time period, most Wagnerian exegeses published there attributed the potency of Wagnerian art and its polarizing quality not to politics, but rather to music drama's unprecedented emotional range. This was certainly Catulle Mendès's viewpoint when he warned his readers about the uncommon level of intensity inherent to the act of sitting through a Wagnerian performance: “Richard Wagner vous transportera extasiés dans un milieu inconnu, où le *sujet* dramatique, vous pénétrant avec une puissance incomparable par tous les sens à la fois, vous fera subir des émotions encore inédites” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 35). The lexicon of—sexual or spiritual, the line is ambiguous—rapture is redolent of Baudelaire's characterization of his experience of Wagnerian music, complete with the mention of its penetrating powers.²⁹

However, the element of surprise was somewhat passé in 1885 and the tone of Mendès's essay appears to be more in tune with 1860s poets' rather whimsical take on Wagner than the—comparatively—more rigorous approach demonstrated in Dujardin and Wyzewa's articles. This old-fashioned quality of Mendès's article can also be confirmed by the following list of ingredients, which he believed to be unique to Wagnerian drama: “Le but, pour le poète-musicien, n'est pas la poésie et n'est pas la musique. Le seul but c'est le drame lui-même, c'est à dire l'action, la passion, la vie” (31). Here, although life is mentioned last for emphasis, it is only one of several important

²⁹ For comparison, see Baudelaire's 1860 letter to the composer: “Autre chose encore : j'ai éprouvé souvent un sentiment d'une nature assez bizarre, c'est l'orgueil et la jouissance de comprendre, de me laisser pénétrer, envahir, volupté vraiment sensuelle, et qui ressemble à celle de monter dans l'air ou de rouler sur la mer. Et la musique en même temps respirait quelquefois l'orgueil de la vie” (*Correspondance* I 673).

components in music drama alongside plot and magnitude of feeling; it does not the elusive source of the spectator's perception of psychological depth in music drama that was theorized by Wyzewa.

By contrast, younger reviewers active in the *Revue* were more attuned to the notion of life as being of vital importance for their investigations of Wagnerian aesthetics, but they had different understandings of its meaning. While some believed Wagner's uncanny ability to create a trompe-l'oeil of the human experience was due to the mystical character inherent in his works, others saw it as a manufactured phenomenon, their philosophical divergence being reminiscent of the conflict between Symbolists and Naturalists. It is possible to encapsulate the latter camp in a December 1885 article, "Documents de Critique Expérimentale: Le Motif-Organe des Maîtres Chanteurs" by yet another inexperienced music critic, Charles Bonnier. Here the adjective "experimental" is not innocent, neither is the apparently incongruous reference to bodily organs. Both seem directly connected to the realm of physiology and the experimental method of Claude Bernard, which was popularized by his famed treatise *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865). Coincidentally, Charles Bonnier's brother, Pierre, was a medical doctor by trade and collaborated on other "experimental articles" with his brother, all of which were also published in the *Revue* before they were gathered into a book in 1887. In any case, this text was symptomatic of a much wider scientific turn within Western Europe, its impact on aesthetic criticism being the new chief criterion: healthiness vs. unhealthiness.³⁰

One of the biggest champions of this medical trend in the literary world was Émile Zola who consistently saw inner life as a tangible—not spiritual—object of scientific inquiry and aimed

³⁰ As Nietzsche's example demonstrates, non-medical specialists were not immune to this type of discourse and even weaponized it against some of their foes, in this case Wagner: "Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn't he rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches—he has made music sick—" (*The Case of Wagner* 164). On the topic of medical interpretations of Wagner, see Kennaway's third chapter, "Modern Music and Nervous Modernity: Wagnerism as a Disease of Civilization, 1850-1914," in *Bad Vibrations* (63-97).

for the thorough study of “la vie passionnelle et intellectuelle” in his own novels.³¹ As a matter of fact, in the 1866 article “Le roman d'analyse,” Zola went so far as to suggest that for a truth-seeking novelist like himself, the writing task was akin to the one of the coroner working his/her way through a cadaver on a cold hard slab:

Le romancier analyste (...) passe le tablier blanc de l'anatomiste et dissèque fibre par fibre la bête humaine étendue toute nue sur la dalle de l'amphithéâtre. Et ici la bête humaine est vivante : ce ne sont pas les organes morts qu'interroge le savant, c'est la vie elle-même, ce sont l'âme et la chair dans leur activité. Sur la dalle, au lieu du cadavre troué par le scalpel, est couché un homme chaud et palpitant de passion, livrant les secrets de son être par chacun de ses gestes et chacune de ses paroles. (*Œuvres Complètes* II 570)

In the imaginary space of the novel where complex human behavior is made more explicable by likening it to basic animal impulses, brains can be spliced open and hearts cut through, their contents being exposed without any damage to the character, an operation that would be impossible to achieve in real life except in postmortem analysis.³² Through the act of verbal dissecting, inner and outer lives are made fully knowable and the novelist is free to reveal or conceal its contents to the reader at will.

Perhaps inspired by Zola, Bonnier conceptualized Wagner's *Meistersinger* as a living organism that could be demystified through anatomizing. With the help of musical analysis, he was able to locate ninety-three motifs that formed the backbone of the score, the combination of which he believed to be responsible for the formerly inexplicable lifelike quality of music drama:

Tout ce qui a vie ne vit qu'à l'état organisé. Les dernières œuvres de Richard Wagner sont les plus vivantes. En me restreignant à l'étude de leur système musical, en laissant de côté les systèmes de la mimique, de la poésie, de la décoration, de la mise en scène, je veux à grands traits disséquer l'organe qui met en circulation la vie particulière à l'œuvre

³¹ In the introduction to *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), Zola describes his goal for the essay in the following terms: “Je vais tâcher de prouver à mon tour que, si la méthode expérimentale conduit à la connaissance de la vie physique, elle doit conduire aussi à la connaissance de la vie passionnelle et intellectuelle” (48).

³² Zola's references to “la bête humaine” do not only foreshadow his own novel, *La Bête Humaine* (1890), but also harken back to Balzac's *avant-propos* for *La Comédie Humaine*: “L'idée première de la Comédie humaine fut d'abord chez moi comme un rêve, comme un de ces projets impossibles que l'on caresse et qu'on laisse s'envoler (...) Mais la chimère, comme beaucoup de chimères, se change en réalité, elle a ses commandements et sa tyrannie auxquels il faut céder. Cette idée vint d'une comparaison entre l'Humanité et l'Animalité” (*La Comédie humaine* I 7).

dramatique. (*La Revue Wagnérienne* 1 314)

Much like in Hoffmann's tale, *Der Sandmann*, where the doll Olympia makes her impressionable dancing partner Nathanael fall in love with her thanks to her self-presentation as the paragon of a refined woman, Wagnerian music drama enforces a full-fledged illusion on his spectators that is just as mysteriously entrancing as the automaton because it is well-skilled at casting the impression of perfection.³³ Yet unlike Hoffmann's mad protagonist, Bonnier refuses to fall prey to trickery and yearns to take a closer look at the inner barks that make up the Wagnerian tree.³⁴ For him, the uncanny *effet de réel* can easily be elucidated: it is simply the result of a series of isolated units—musical motifs that were to become fashionable under Wolzogen's neologism, “leitmotifs”—the great chain of which establishes the impression of continuity on the stage, one that is reminiscent of real-life temporality.³⁵ In this mechanistic, even Cartesian, vision of art, there is no mention of sacred “breath,” or other mystical principle of life as discussed by 19th-century vitalists, and no acknowledgment of Wagner's religious and political aspirations; in other words, the notes are severed from the composer's intentions.

Nevertheless, for all of his rigor in examining the insides of the Wagnerian beast, Bonnier

³³ Adorno was perceptive of the mechanics: “Das Produkt präsentiert sich als sich selbst Produzierendes; daher auch der Primat von Leitton und Chroma. Indem die ästhetische Erscheinung keinen Blick mehr durchläßt auf Kräfte und Bedingungen ihres realen Produziertseins, erhebt ihr Schein als lückenloser den Anspruch des Seins. Die Vollendung des Scheins ist zugleich die Vollendung des illusionären Charakters des Kunstwerks als eines Wirklichen *sui generis*, das im Bereich der absoluten Erscheinung sich konstituiert, ohne doch auf Abbildlichkeit zu verzichten” (*Versuch über Wagner* 80) / “The product presents itself as self-producing; hence too the primacy of chromaticism and the leading note. In the absence of any glimpse of the underlying force or conditions of its production, this outer appearance can lay claim to the status of being. Its perfection is at the same time the perfection of the illusion that the work of art is a reality *sui generis* that constitutes itself in the realm of the absolute without having to renounce its claim to image the world” (*In Search of Wagner* 74).

³⁴ The picture can be seen under this link: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k19995b/f336.image>

³⁵ Here I borrow the term from Barthes's 1968 article “L'Effet de Réel,” which he believes to originate from a detailed description full of seemingly superfluous elements: “car dans le moment même où ces détails sont réputés dénoter directement le réel, ils ne font rien d'autre, sans le dire, que le signifier : le baromètre de Flaubert, la petite porte de Michelet ne disent finalement rien d'autre que ceci : *nous sommes le réel* ; c'est la catégorie du “réel” (et non ses contenus contingents) qui est alors signifiée” (88). In the case of Wagner, objects can also take on special musical/narrative importance thanks to the device of leitmotif, see for instance the “ring motif,” or “the sword motif” in the *Ring* cycle.

opens up his work to the reader's interpretation, and therefore to possible inaccuracies: “Je ne donnerai donc que la légende explicative d'une sorte de préparation anatomique du système musical de la vie dramatique dans cette œuvre si puissamment organisée, laissant au lecteur entreprenant le plaisir de synthétiser l'homme dans son œuvre, l'artiste dans son caractère [sic]” (Idem). In effect, synthesizing one's knowledge of the man and his oeuvre and combining the results with personal impressions of the music is an accurate description for the subjective nature of musical criticism. Apart from the objective language of music theory used by Bonnier, it is in fact impossible to perform a faithful verbal gloss of musical events insofar as there are issues of translation from one idiom to another. A “scientific” account of a Wagnerian work and its effects on concert-goers is thus dead on arrival because it cannot move away from the score. What is needed instead in order to convey the *effet de réel* is an intimate rendering of the critic's unique listening experience. Few Wagnerian exegetes understood that necessity as clearly as Wyzewa, and even fewer used the same creativity when dealing with Wagner's theoretical texts.

Considering Wyzewa's activity as a Wagnerian theorist, it is perhaps more accurate to call his articles rewritings than strictly exegetic texts, the product of a singular mind that lived on a separate plane from his colleagues. As a matter of fact, Wyzewa's peculiar outlook on the world and his biting irony, both of which he believed to be the product of his Slavic heritage, alienated many.³⁶ Although mean-spirited accounts from former friends—like Jacques-Émile Blanche or J.H. Rosny—and foes abound, one unpublished letter from Chamberlain to Dujardin stands out in terms of vocalizing just how strange a thinker he truly was, its harsh criticism pointing to the

³⁶ Wyzewa himself provided numerous definitions of what he considered to be “l'esprit slave” throughout his career. The following is perhaps one of the most concise clarifications provided by Wyzewa himself: “De cette émotion ininterrompue jointe à la vision précise des choses naît la qualité fondamentale de l'esprit slave : l'ironie. Ils perçoivent l'image exacte de ce qui les entoure : mais ne pouvant y rester indifférents, ils donnent à leur perception une forme railleuse” (*La Revue indépendante* 274).

divisive nature of Wyzewa's demanding writing style and highly idealistic ideas:

J'ai lu l'article de Wyzewa, il n'est pas difficile, je le trouve très clair. (...) Ce que je ne puis admirer, c'est le style de M. de Wyzewa; je le trouve laid au plus haut degré. Mon opinion sur une telle question vous est, naturellement, fort indifférente ; mais notez deux choses : je suis sans aucun préjugé, j'aime ce qui est beau. J'ai admiré votre style, depuis le premier jour ; j'ai pu regretter que vous vous fassiez des ennemis ; à moi personnellement, les étrangetés et les hardiesses étaient fort indifférentes ; le résultat étant beau, vraiment très beau. Plusieurs de vos chroniques [sic] je relis souvent, cela m'est un vrai régal. J'ai relu Mallarmé, je le trouve sublime. Mais, ayez donc la bonté de me dire en quoi consiste la beauté spéciale du français de M. de Wyzewa. Vous, vous êtes hardi, vous êtes étrange, souvent—peut-être—extravagant, vous êtes éminemment “one-sided,” votre jugement n'est pas toujours large, — tout ce qu'on voudra; mais, comme œuvre d'art, ce que vous écrivez est beau, et non seulement cela, on sent toujours une intelligence très large et bien équilibrée; (...) on sent que cet homme aux étranges visions et au sublime idéal a deux pieds forts et bien plantés sur la terre réelle; on sent qu'à ce sens si développé de la proportion, en matière d'art, correspond un état d'équilibre parfait intellectuel et moral. Voilà ce qui me paraît manquer chez Wyzewa ; il me fait l'effet d'un homme au cerveau anormalement développé par rapport au reste; d'une puissance de pensée extraordinaire, mais manquant d'équilibre et de proportion. Tant pis, tant pis ! (October 10, 1885. HRC Folder 29.2)

What is most notable is the opposition set by Chamberlain between Dujardin and Wyzewa, one that centers on dichotomies like beauty vs. ugliness, balance vs. unruliness, totality vs. fragmentation. In the Englishman's view, Dujardin, for all of his occasional stylistic temerity, is representative of French classical virtues and embodies a picture of healthy living: “équilibré,” with a “sens (...) de la proportion (...) un état d'équilibre parfait intellectuel et moral.” In contrast, Wyzewa, the Slav, stands as a deficient man whose oddity cannot be counterbalanced by discipline, a monad of sorts whose metaphorical macrocephalic head has sucked the bloodstream away from the limbs and rendered his writing limp.³⁷ Unlike Dujardin, he is unable to connect to the ground—shorthand for traditional values and related to the later Nazi slogan of *Blut und Boden*—and is thus cast as a pure spirit unable to share his sublime visions with others.

³⁷ A similar image makes an appearance in *Valbert*: “j'étais emprisonné dans mon cerveau. Seule de tout mon corps, ma tête vivait. Quand j'avais essayé de marcher devant moi, elle m'avait empêché d'avancer (...) j'avais alors ressemblé à ces enfants hydrocéphales qui ne peuvent faire un pas sans tomber” (172).

This pathological prevalence of the brain over the rest of the body in Chamberlain's text refers back to Wyzewa's idiosyncratic brand of idealism,—part neo-Platonism, part 18-century monistic doctrine—which he shared with his Symbolist colleagues to a degree.³⁸ The list included Dujardin, who eloquently encapsulated the Schopenhauer-inspired ethos of the 1880s in a theatrical metaphor: “Le monde extérieur est un décor qui se monte et se démonte à la commande du poète. Répéterai-je qu’il n’est question que de l’âme dans la littérature de cette époque ?” (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 93) As noted earlier, although authors like Villiers, Gourmont, Dujardin and Wyzewa claimed to be spiritual followers of German Idealism—whether that meant Hegel, Schopenhauer or Fichte, none of whom they read particularly closely—and worshippers of the absolute, they often manifested a certain anxiety as to the real-life consequences of shunning the phenomenal world for the benefit of the Idea. And nowhere is the cognitive dissonance between theory and practice more apparent than in their formally fragmented and tonally disenchanting novels, where their Sisyphean protagonists remain reliably celibate, all the while making ill-fated attempts at connecting with others.

Owing to its celebration of German culture and thought, the *Revue Wagnérienne* was a forum of choice for these Symbolist idealistic leanings, and as Dujardin noted years later, introduced many to the work of Schopenhauer via Wagner's theoretical texts.³⁹ Chief of them was the 1870 essay, *Beethoven*, which Wyzewa began translating in May 1885 and issued in monthly installments until August of the same year. In Wagner's eyes, Beethoven had experienced

³⁸ For instance, Gourmont's article, “L'idéalisme,” is quite similar in tone to Wyzewa's form of solipsism: “on ne connaît que sa propre intelligence, que soi, seule réalité, le monde spécial et unique que le moi détient, véhicule, déforme, exténue, recrée selon sa personnelle activité; rien ne se meut en dehors du sujet connaissant; tout ce que je pense est réel : la seule réalité, c'est la pensée” (*Le Chemin de velours* 203).

³⁹ “Wagner a été d’abord, le truchement par qui la plupart d’entre nous ont pénétré dans Schopenhauer, et, ensuite, le magnifique exemple dépassant tout ce que le vieux philosophe de Francfort pouvait imaginer, et démontrant comment la musique savait être Volonté de Vivre. Délibérément, nous assîmes la poésie sur le trône schopenhauérien de la musique. Et c’est ce qu’on entend lorsque l’on dit que le symbolisme, libérant du servage de l’intellectualisme la poésie, lui a restitué sa valeur musicale” (“Le monologue intérieur” 256).

Schopenhauer's divided vision of the world—phenomenon vs. noumenon—first-hand, his deafness having forced him to seek refuge within himself and relinquish any distraction from the outside.⁴⁰ In so doing, he was able to gain access to the absolute, a revelation he wished to convey in his own music: “il a ouvert, devant nous, le spectacle de cet Art qui, à toute conscience, révèle l’univers de la vie suprême...” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 108). The very nebulousness of the expression “univers de la vie suprême” certainly allowed room for interpretation and was to prove fertile ground for Wyzewa in his own critical work, where he took later Wagnerian texts such as *Beethoven* or *Religion and Art* as his guiding light over the Zürich-years treatises.

The first article of the “Wagnerian Art trilogy,” “Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne,” gave Wyzewa the opportunity to elaborate on the tenets of his own extreme idealistic philosophy, a goal he accomplished through multiple variations on the Wagnerian origin myth for music drama. If Wagner had used a sexual metaphor in *Opera and Drama*,—where the act of intercourse between word (male) and music (female) serves as prelude to the birth of their child, music drama—Wyzewa avoided any obvious references to that analogy and understood the beginning of artistic life quite differently. In his avoidance of the heterosexual analogy, he ran contrary to most commentators, like Mendès who had earmarked the theory as central to Wagnerian art in “Notes sur la théorie et l’œuvre wagnériennes.” Presumably, for Wyzewa, the illusion of life was not to be produced with recourse to another entity, it was to be self-generated as the product of the artist's work of introspection, following the example of Beethoven. In sum, it was solipsistic and as poems like Dujardin's “À la gloire d'Antonia” or a novel like Gourmont's *Sixtine* (1890) tend to

⁴⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the special significance of Beethoven's life for the *Revue wagnérienne*, see section 2 of the preceding chapter. It is also important to note that by 1870, Wagner had evolved in his thinking about artistic creation and exhibited “re-animated faith in the Romantic ideology of the absolute, immanent musical meaning” (*Wagner's Musical Prose* 53).

demonstrate, doomed to fail when confronted with reality.⁴¹

Shortly after having argued that Wagnerian art—defined as “la fusion de toutes les formes de l'art, dans une intention commune”—should not be confined to music drama, but rather that its “life-juice” flood into the neighboring realms of literature and the visual arts, Wyzewa made clear his allegiance to a belief system resembling George Berkeley's subjective idealism, thereby proposing yet another reinterpretation of the Wagnerian worldview (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 101). In effect, the doctrine Wyzewa promoted was that only the mind and its contents exist, not the external world, which is a product of our imagination, a fact of which we only become conscious when we bring an artwork into being.⁴² Once again, he seemed to take on an 18th-century viewpoint in his Wagnerian criticism:

L'Art, nous dit Wagner, doit créer la vie. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'il doit poursuivre, volontairement, la fonction naturelle de toute activité intellectuelle. C'est que le monde où nous vivons, et que nous dénommons réel est une pure création de notre âme. L'esprit ne peut sortir de lui-même ; et les choses qu'il croit extérieures à lui sont, uniquement, ses idées. Voir, entendre, c'est créer en soi des apparences, donc créer la Vie. Mais l'habitude funeste des mêmes créations nous a fait perdre la conscience joyeuse de notre pouvoir créateur ; nous avons cru réels ces rêves que nous enfantions, et ce moi personnel, limité par les choses, soumis à elles, que nous avons conçu. Dès lors nous avons été les esclaves du monde, et ce monde, où nous avons engagé nos intérêts, il nous a été sans plaisir. Et la Vie que nous avons créée, créée afin de nous donner la joie créatrice, a perdu son caractère premier. Il faut donc la recréer : il faut, au-dessus de ce monde des apparences habituelles profanées, bâtir le monde saint d'une meilleure vie : meilleur par ce que nous le pouvons créer volontairement, et savoir que nous le créons. C'est la tâche même de l'art. (101-102)

⁴¹ For a detailed analysis of Dujardin's poem, see section 2 from the previous chapter. As for *Sixtine*, there are multiple passages indicting the monadic fantasy devised in “L'idéalisme,” such as this one where the protagonist, Entragues, is daydreaming an idealized artwork in a manner that foreshadows twentieth-century performance art, only to recognize its preposterousness: “mon œuvre véritable sera celle-ci: un être né avec la complète paralysie de tous les sens, en lequel ne fonctionne que le cerveau et l'appareil nutritif. Il n'a jamais eu aucune connaissance des choses externes, puisque même la sensivité de la peau est absente. Un miracle, électrique ou autre, le guérit partiellement, il apprend à parler et raconte sa vie cérébrale : elle est pareille aux autres vies. (...) En réfléchissant, il reconnut que son mépris du matérialisme l'entraînait un peu loin : c'était verser dans l'absurde” (161).

⁴² Berkeley was never a proper “maître à penser” for Wyzewa, who preferred to amalgamate various idealist thinkers in order to forge his own metaphysics, as Sandrine Schiano-Bennis has argued “ceux-ci ne sont cités que pour confirmer ses intuitions personnelles” (*La Renaissance de l'idéalisme* 262). However, in *Valbert* (1893), the protagonist—himself modelled after the author—does mention Berkeley: “Car je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire—après ce que vous savez de moi—que je m'étais spécialement attaché dès ma jeunesse aux théories des idéalistes, Platon, Berkeley, Fichte. J'avais appris d'eux que l'univers extérieur était un rêve de ma pensée, que toute réalité réelle était en moi seul, et tout pouvoir de créer” (169).

Here another notable influence is Plato, particularly so the “allegory of the cave” from book VII of the *Republic*, to which the lexicon of captivity and constraint—“l’habitude funeste,” “limité,” “soumis,” “esclaves”—seemingly alludes. According to Wyzewa, in a science-led world where the grand illusion of objectivity is being worshipped, it is up to the artist to follow the light away from years of deterministic delusion.⁴³ Once he/she is able to reconcile himself with his/her agency as an individual, the prisoner is able to “secouer ses chaînes” and turn himself/herself into “le Mage divin” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 2 169).

Following the paradigmatic example of Beethoven, the enlightened creator is able to lead others down the path of light by sensually transmitting the mystical joy he/she underwent in the creative act where he/she finally became aware of the full range of their powers. Thus the artwork itself becomes a totem where the revelation of totality, better summarized as “the world is my representation,” took place: “L’Art doit donc recréer, dans une pleine conscience, et par le moyen de signes, la vie totale de l’Univers, c’est-à-dire de l’Âme, où se joue le drame varié que nous appelons l’Univers” (Idem). Once more, the equation between human existence and drama emerges as a key component of Wyzewa’s aesthetics: revealing the contents of one’s consciousness—which for Wyzewa and Dujardin is synonymous with the more religiously connoted word *âme*—is an act akin to inviting another into a projection of our representation of the world within our own miniature theater. It is the very same *laterna magica* that likely inspired Dujardin’s attempts at complete disclosure of the inner mind in *Les Lauriers sont coupés* and the

⁴³ Contrary to Wagner who welcomed technological progress for performances of his works in the theatre, Wyzewa was particularly virulent against science. See for instance the February 1887 article “La suggestion, le spiritisme et les prétentions de la science” in which a naïve nanny-figure (in the mold of Vincentine) triumphs over scientists by demonstrating the eternal validity of subjective idealism over science’s ephemeral grasp of truth: “C’est l’âme qui impose les lois aux choses, mobiles fleurs de sa fantaisie, et l’âme a le pouvoir de changer les lois et les choses, lorsqu’elle est amenée à le vouloir. (...) La science, c’est la fixation (toujours provisoire) de certains ordres de faits : c’est un premier effort de ta pensée à créer l’univers harmonieusement” (*La Revue indépendante* 2 222).

Antonia tragedy cycle.⁴⁴ Yet unlike a regular dramatic spectacle, there are no actors, props or sets, only the “trois modes distincts et successifs de la Sensation, de la Notion, et de l’Émotion” to which correspond three media: images, words and musical notes (Idem). Only in uniting these three modes can the totality of a singular vision be conveyed.

This fusion of media and modes of existence, according to Wyzewa, constituted Wagner's greatest achievement and one that needed to be recreated in the world of letters, particularly so in the novel, the one literary form he saw as being most in need of revivification, as revealed in the next article, “Notes sur la littérature wagnérienne”:

Littérateurs, comprenez l’effort de vos devanciers : ils ont employé leurs âmes à créer une meilleure vie : poursuivez leur tâche en créant la vie que peuvent concevoir vos âmes nouvelles ! J’ai tenté la création totale de la vie par l’union des arts : mais les arts n’étaient point prêts : vous les préparerez. Vous ne dédaignerez aucun mode de la vie, parmi ceux dont est capable la littérature. La vie est un enchaînement d’idées, sensibles, abstraites, se produisant l’une l’autre, et d’émotions : vous jugerez tous ces éléments dignes d’entrer dans votre œuvre, et vous rechercherez les signes spéciaux qui conviennent à chacun d’eux. Votre roman ne sera ni un naturalisme, ni une psychologie, ni une fine musique verbale : il sera vivant, par l’union de toutes ces formes. Alors, sur le fondement d’une littérature enfin constituée, la peinture et la musique pourront ajouter leurs modes vitaux : les artistes auront l’Art : la vie complète sera créée, par l’alliance de tous ses modes. (*La Revue Wagnérienne* 2 165)

It is rather strange to witness a budding writer like Wyzewa hand over his dream of a novelistic *Gesamtkunstwerk* to his peers, even providing them a “how-to guide” on how to accomplish his vision. Are we to interpret this as a testament to his humility or a shrewd manoeuvre to position himself as the intellectual leader of the French Wagnerian movement? The answer might lie somewhere in between.

⁴⁴ Most scholarly discussions of Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* acknowledge his philosophical and formal debt to Wyzewa, starting with Melvin Friedman's 1955 *Stream of Consciousness* (8) all the way into Valérie Michelet-Jacquod's 2008 *Le Roman symboliste* where she describes Wyzewa as having “lanc[é] un appel qui creuse la place où viendra se loger le récit de Dujardin” (254).

In a December 1885 letter sent to Dujardin during the first year of the *Revue's* publication, Wyzewa confessed his desire to pen a poetic ekphrasis of a Wagnerian orchestral suite—*Siegfried-Idyll*—in the vein of Dujardin's own “*Amfortas*, paraphrase moderne,” which took the eponymous King's first appearance in act I of *Parsifal* as its poetic subject.⁴⁵ Only this time, Wyzewa proposed another kind of poem that was more in line with Mallarmé's *Rêverie*: if his future sonnet were to echo Wagnerian themes, it was to focus on subjective listening impressions awakened by the music and refrain from alluding to the visuals. However, for all of his precision in the description of the would-be-poem, Wyzewa's vulnerability as a fiction writer and poet is conspicuous in the letter, likely the product of unfavorable comparisons between himself and Dujardin:

Je voudrais énormément écrire un petit chapitre sur Siegfried-Idyll. Ni une critique technique, ni un poème en prose ; mais ceci :

Je raconterai mon ennui, au dernier concert, mes tristes pensées matérielles; et voilà que le morceau m'occupe : un bercement d'abord, un doux arrachement à l'apparence; et le motif de Siegfried me fait voir une vie délicieuse, en un paysage de rêverie, où je marcherai avec Elle; et l'autre motif, change mon rêve; c'est le Jour en la Gloire et le scherzo rutilant des ambitions; puis la berceuse me donnait le bercement des rêves apaisés, un monde enchanté de rien, et le réveil, enfin, le retour désolé à une apparence, la malédiction [illegible] de l'Art d'autrui, qui ne se peut continuer.

Une analyse, mesure par mesure, mais toute des impressions subjectives : cela aurait à peine trois pages, serait actuel, et peut-être amusant. En tous [sic] cas, je serai si heureux d'écrire enfin dans cette revue des phrases qui m'amuseraient, moi-même, et me montreraient, ami, autre chose qu'un fastidieux théoricien.

Tu me diras demain si tu peux me rendre le dernier grand service de cette insertion. Pour le sonnet, je tâcherai encore, mais je doute que je le puisse faire : je l'ai rêvé trop difficile, des luttes de motif, et de motifs transposés de la musique originale. Je te donnerai le sonnet, ou le renoncement, dans une semaine. (Letter from December 1, 1885. Folder 91.6, HRC)

⁴⁵ It is likely that Dujardin was still working on that piece when Wyzewa wrote the letter as the *Amfortas* paraphrase was published on December 8, 1885. For a thorough analysis of this text, see Steven Huebner's “Édouard Dujardin, Wagner, and the Origins of Stream of Consciousness Writing,” *19th-Century Music* 37:1 (Summer 2013): 77-80.

The resulting text became part of the *Revue wagnérienne*'s poetic *Hommage à Wagner*, which had the distinction of unofficially kick-starting the Symbolist movement in January 1886.⁴⁶ As the letter projected, it takes a symphonic piece by Wagner, “Siegfried-Idyll,” as its point of departure:

VII - SIEGFRIED-IDYLL

Programme

Endormez-vous ! l'éveil des rêves embaumés
 Vous secoue au lointain oreiller de folie,
 Apparences d'un Monde vain, peine abolie :
 Dormez ! c'est l'éveil bleu des Visions : dormez !

Voici qu'au seuil profond de la Vague apaisée,
 Avec Elle, — ô le feu de sa lèvre baisée ! —
 Je vais sous le long voile indolent d'un Minuit.

Et voici qu'étonnante et sonnante, m'enivre,
 — Mais c'est un chant d'Oiseau qui me salue, et fuit, —
 La Gloire m'enivrant aux lourds fracas de cuivre.

Endormez-vous, les mauvais rêves, abîmés
 Dans l'éveil évoquant la Vision jolie :
 L'Oiseau chante, la Gloire enivre, l'Ame oublie ;
 Et le Joyeux Orgueil s'épand aux bleus sommets !
 (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 341)

A formally audacious piece, the sonnet's unusual distribution of its two quatrains and two tercets reshuffles the traditional sonnet structure and is in fact the only one of the eight sonnets to do so. Thematically, it takes inspiration from a chamber music piece—not from a Wagnerian music drama—and invokes the birdsong included in the original title: *Tribschener Idyll mit Fidi-Vogelgesang und Orange-Sonnenaufgang, als Symphonischer Geburtstagsgruss*.⁴⁷ As for the

⁴⁶ Here Wyzewa was in rather august company: one of the eight poems was authored by Mallarmé, another by Verlaine and another by Dujardin. On the significance of *Hommage à Wagner* for the nascent Symbolist movement, see Jean-Nicolas Illouz's article “Les manifestes symbolistes” where he calls the sonnets “la première manifestation collective d'une école qui ne dispose pas encore de son nom, mais qui se reconnaît déjà dans une commune religion du ‘dieu Richard Wagner’” (97).

⁴⁷ *Siegfried Idyll* was composed on the occasion of Cosima's birthday and performed on Christmas morning 1870 by a small ensemble of thirteen musicians on the stairs of the Tribschen house Wagner shared with her and their children.

prominence of sleep as a theme in this poem, it originates from the music itself, where Wagner borrows a motif from the German lullaby “Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf” and gives it over to the oboe. In the Wyzewa sonnet, the berceuse melody is reconfigured and transformed into a verbal illustration of his idealistic philosophy: “Apparences d'un Monde vain (...) Dormez” (Idem). But for all of its innovative disposition and clever references, the text is undoubtedly clumsy in its choice of evocative images. Although a few of the lofty concepts mentioned in the letter—the Eternal Feminine and oneiric slumber among them—are rechanneled here, they are regrettably betrayed by pedestrian assemblages, such as the unintentionally comical “oreiller de folie” in the second line, which are absent from Wyzewa's more self-assured critical works.

In light of the creative insecurity apparent in the letter and the sonnet, my investigation of Wyzewa's future career as a novelist, which began in earnest with the 1893 semi-autobiographical novel *Valbert* (1893), transitioned into the highly personal *Ma Tante Vincentine* (1913), and ended with his third novel *Le Cahier rouge* (1917), may seem to be a rather anecdotal endeavor, yet another example of undeserved scholarly attention given to a *minore* writer. And yet, in the wake of the *Revue wagnérienne*'s demise in 1888, Wyzewa's creative voice did mature considerably and the gifts that shone through his numerous delightful anecdotes from the *Revue wagnérienne* and the *Revue indépendante*—such as the Hercules dilemma—eventually became apparent in his longer texts. Although he did not follow in Dujardin's footsteps and wrote formally conventional novels, Wyzewa's fiction exhibits qualities on par with other Symbolist writers like Gourmont and Rodenbach and is rich in philosophical and stylistic subtleties demanding further analysis. Time and time again Wyzewa succeeded in proving he was indeed far from “un fastidieux théoricien,” positioning himself as a worthy novelist at the juncture of Symbolism and the fin-de-siècle Catholic revival led by authors such as Huysmans, Claudel and Mauriac.

Durch Mitleid wissend, der reine Thor? Deconstructing the Wagnerian totality in the novel

Much like Wagner himself, Wyzewa imagined the specifics of his artistic future and couched them in text prior to realizing them in his literary output. Utilizing both the *Revue wagnérienne* and the *Revue indépendante* as an avenue of research, he enticed others to produce lifelike literature before he could apply part of his ambitious program of emotional immediacy and thought intimacy to his own works.⁴⁸ Part of that transitional phase between theory and practicality involved using fictional *alter egos*, a commonality with other Symbolist novelists who were fond of placing doubles in their works. However, Wyzewa's first artistic *doppelgänger* did not appear in his fiction, instead it took the form of a theoretical concept, an idealized version of himself conceived with the aim of galvanizing himself and others to reform the French artistic landscape.

In a July 1885 article for the *Revue wagnérienne* entitled, “Le pessimisme de Richard Wagner,” Wyzewa unveiled an exemplary character named “le Mage Divin” whom he likely modeled after Beethoven. As the adjective “divine” would suggest, this idealized figure is a demiurgic artist whose creative process draws from such diverse influences as Platonism, Wagnerism and Christian mysticism.⁴⁹ An archetype for uninhibited artistry and self-knowledge, the “Mage Divin” is an alchemist of sorts who is able to transform negative elements from the phenomenal world—egoism, anxiety, nihilism—into the gold of artistic creation. This process of conversion, which serves as a prelude to the birth of the artwork, is reminiscent of the Catholic

⁴⁸ Dujardin was not the only writer to be inspired by Wyzewa's metaphysical expectations for literature. In an 1890 epistolary exchange between Romain Rolland and André Suarès, the latter wrote: “le seul dénommé de Wyzewa (...) m'est le seul critique qui fut entièrement (...) un artiste; même (...) Teodor de Wyzewa me donnerait l'ennui obsessif d'un incommode dédoublement de moi-même : de tous artistes qu'il juge, de tous avis métaphysiques dont il est coutumier, je ne voudrais pas exprimer d'autres convictions (...) il use un esprit très noble, le plus musical, une métaphysique seule réelle en ses attitudes dédaigneuses un peu, une merveilleuse certitude artistique” (*Cahiers Romain Rolland* 5 205).

⁴⁹ The reference to magic foreshadows Péladan's experiments with the occult and his self-presentation as a Babylonian Mage or “Sâr” in the early 1890s at the Salons de la Rose + Croix.

doctrine of transubstantiation.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the presence of abundant references to *Parsifal*—a work where Christian symbolism is overwhelmingly present and a scene of Eucharist occurs at the close of act I—underpins the transcendent nature of Wyzewa's poetics and his aspiration to divulge inscrutable truths with the aid of the aesthetic experience:

Le Mage a vu son pouvoir : il l'emploie. L'incohérence des fantômes, la diversité des intérêts et des choses, naguère, l'angoissait ; mais c'était la résistance du Néant à l'Idée créatrice ; et le Mage la brise. Il renonce à l'égoïsme, comme à une limite cruelle : il va, maintenant, mettre en ses œuvres l'Unité, ayant acquis le Charme de la vraie Science. Il va purifier son âme, la mêler à ce Non-Moi, qui est son âme, encore. Il laissera vivre les Cygnes, dans les grands lacs ; se blesser, n'est-ce point souffrir ? Il guérira le malade Amfortas ; se guérir, n'est-ce point jouir ? Et, par la Compassion sur le Monde — sur lui-même — il donnera, pleinement, à sa Création l'harmonie, qui finira la Souffrance volontaire. Et le Mage sera Parsifal ; et le Graal divin, par lui regagné, sera la bienheureuse joie de l'Orgueil, l'Apparence enfin recrée. (169)⁵¹

Notwithstanding the fact that key plot points from *Parsifal*—the killing of the swan and the wound of Amfortas—are obliquely mentioned by Wyzewa, this excerpt strays from the original so as to better reflect the author's solipsistic beliefs. Contrary to the “pure fool” who is introduced to the stage as the simpleminded killer of a wild swan, a gratuitous act of cruelty for which he is condemned by the Grail Knights, the mage does not need to experience destruction and remorse before he becomes compassionate. Instead, he relies on himself to learn self-denial and subsequently finds joy in the act of helping others.

In a rather covert manner, this short excerpt seems to pose the question that has long eluded exegetes of *Parsifal*: are the Christian themes of purification, redemption and miraculous healing

⁵⁰ Dujardin later used the term to characterize Mallarmé's poetics: “Je me souviens que Mallarmé m'a dit un jour : ‘Je raye le mot comme du dictionnaire.’ Voilà le secret de Mallarmé. Il ne dit plus : ‘Telle chose ressemble à telle autre...’ Pour lui, cette chose est devenue cette autre. Il y a là une sorte d'acte de magie, au sens que donne au mot ‘magie’ l'histoire des religions. (...) Ce mystère est celui de la transsubstantiation” (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 50-51).

⁵¹ This passage exists in a slightly different version in the collection of essays, *Nos Maîtres* (1895). One notable difference involves the description of the Grail, which has now become “trois fois saint,” a likely allusion to the concept of triple sainthood, appearing in *Isaiah* 6:3 “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” and also in *Revelation* 4:8 “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty.” It is possible to interpret this modification in light of Wyzewa's growing interest in Catholicism, which coincided with his marriage to Marguerite Terlinden—herself, a fervent believer—in 1894 and was exacerbated by her untimely death in 1901.

to be taken seriously, or are they—as its detractors would say—part of what Alain Badiou calls a “symbolic hotchpotch,” all too easy to mock because of their heavy-handedness and “dubious sexual symbology?” (*Five Lessons on Wagner* 136-137) In other words, can we bring to light what Badiou designates as “the real subject” in *Parsifal*, namely the wider ethical implications of a drama where the titular character rejects women and saves his male community through the demonstration of his chastity? If the stage is, as both Mallarmé and Wagner understood, the locus for a communal experience that would bring forth the possibility for epiphany, can a similar dynamic be captured by a book without recourse to the “Type” or the singing performer to animate its lifeless words?

These are some of the questions underlying the plot of *Valbert*, a novel that stages the ideal of the “Mage Divin,” complete with the cave and the ghosts who inhabit it, but one that strives to confront the idealistic chimera with the disappointing reality of the author's personal experiences. In a typically Symbolist twist, however, the prison is not a physical location, but rather a mental straightjacket, out of which the protagonist desperately tries to wriggle, while the wraiths take the form of various love objects. As seen previously in the case of *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, the single hero's fixation with coupledness is rooted in a longing towards completeness, as explained in this excerpt from Wyzewa's very first “Les Livres” column for the *Revue indépendante*:

Je pense (...) que “la clef de voûte de l'échelle idéale des êtres” est l'Art : et que l'Amour est une forme inférieure de cette joie suprême. Aimer une femme, c'est élargir sa vie, associer aux étroites pensées d'un moi personnel et borné les pensées d'une autre âme. Par l'Amour, autrui nous devient réel : mais surtout par l'Art, qui néglige toutes les misères de l'apparence universelle et se crée librement une vie totale et joyeuse, la vie d'un monde infini. (“Les Livres,” *La Revue indépendante* 1 12)

Here what is particularly striking is the notion of enlarging one's life, in other words, securing a romantic partner as a precondition to achieving the depiction of “une vie totale et joyeuse” in the artwork. Following the model of Plato's hermaphrodite, Wyzewa conjectures singledom as

antithetical to artistic totality on account of either sex possessing too narrow a viewpoint on its own, a theory he kept putting to the test in all of his novels.

In actuality, Wyzewa's fiction puts solipsism on trial time and time again in a manner that would not have occurred to the less experienced critic of the *Revue wagnérienne*. To be sure, when the “Mage Divin” paradigm is confronted with the trials of romantic love and the specifically fin-de-siècle fear of women, its limits as a valid artistic model are exposed. Hence, for all of his reluctance to engage with sexuality too directly, Wyzewa's framework for the artist seems to corroborate the Wagnerian metaphor of intercourse between man (word) and woman (music) in *Oper und Drama*: just as a lone man cannot conceive a child, neither can the *logos* bring music drama to the world on its own; both require the participation of another, be it female or music, in order to bring about the possibility of wholeness.⁵²

As the reader who is even casually acquainted with Symbolist novels would know, the search for unity—artistic and amorous—constitutes both a major plot line and a primary objective for the male protagonist, as Valbert himself exclaims: “Je voudrais seulement trouver une femme qui me permit de l'aimer (...) que mon cœur se mit d'accord avec le sien, pour qu'ensuite nous n'ayons plus qu'à goûter l'immortelle délice de cette entente à jamais fixée” (Valbert 203). Yet it is invariably doomed. In the case of Daniel Prince, for instance, once his repeated attempts at wooing the mercenary actress Léa d'Arsay fall flat, his measly efforts at writing must necessarily follow the same fate. Unrepentant narcissism equals artistic sterility.

⁵² Wagner's condemnation of singledom was exactly what precipitated him to break with Nietzsche. Performing the part of the concerned friend, Wagner approached Nietzsche's personal physician with a letter requesting a medical prescription for a wife in order to prevent a sure case of blindness induced by nefarious masturbatory habits: “I have been thinking for some time of identical and very similar experiences which I recall having had with certain young men of great intellectual ability. I saw them being destroyed by similar symptoms, and discovered only too clearly that these symptoms were the result of masturbation. Guided by these experiences, I observed N. more closely and, on the strength of his traits and characteristic habits, this fear of mine became a conviction” (quoted in *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* 131).

From *Les Lauriers* to *Bruges-la-Morte*, the romantic and creative quests' interdependence is repeatedly shown to be a symptom of delusion, an implicit but biting critique of an idealistic model where the outside world and its shadows are carbon copies of our subjective representations. Valérie Michelet-Jacquod goes as far as to envisage Symbolist prose narratives as a locus where the Wagnerian ideal of unity fractures on the dual wall of real life and literary practice: “Certes, le symbolisme poursuit l’œuvre de synthèse, l’œuvre absolue exaltée par Wagner, via Schopenhauer, mais il fait dans le même temps la démonstration du caractère impossible de cet idéal après l’avoir mis à l’examen” (Idem 25). However, not all Symbolist novels wrestle with Wagnerian totality so directly, not even *Les Lauriers*. Only in *Valbert ou les récits d'un jeune homme* are we treated to an actual confrontation followed by an implicit refutation, a fact corroborated by the thematic choice of opening and ending the novel at the Bayreuth Festival.⁵³

Yet on the surface the Bayreuth frame and the mention of two performances—*Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*—appear to be incongruous when juxtaposed with a linear narrative that openly contradicts the forward-thinking aesthetic principles laid out in the “Wagnerian Art” trilogy. If *Les Lauriers sont coupés* represented an imperfect attempt at realizing Wyzewa's Wagnerian program, namely the accurate portrayal of human emotions, feelings and notions in a lone consciousness over the course of a single day, why then did *Valbert* seem to take a formal step back from those ideals, preferring instead to harken back to tonal and structural conventions from the previous century? Why did it forsake the illusion of wholeness for an episodic structure

⁵³ Strangely enough, there are more Decadent texts than Symbolist ones taking place at the Bayreuth festival. See, for instance, the final scene of Élémer Bourges's *Le Crépuscule des dieux* (1884), where an international moneyed audience is condemned by the author for its vulgarity during a performance of *Götterdämmerung*, and also Joséphine Péladan's *La Victoire du Mari* (1889), which includes a highly sexualized rendition of *Tristan und Isolde* where the singers' sensuality on the stage is mirrored by concupiscent audience members and a dubiously “healing” performance of *Parsifal*.

characterized by the narrator himself as “des épisodes isolés, sans lien apparent les uns avec les autres” (89)?

Numerous critics, such as Pierre Quillard, Paul Delsemme and Valérie Michelet-Jacquod, have pointed out connections between *Valbert* and eighteenth-century memoirs, but fewer have noticed additional thematic ties between its hero's chaotic sentimental education and *Bildungsroman* tropes.⁵⁴ Chronologically arranged in a series of seven episodes, each one involving a real or imagined romance derived from Wyzewa's personal wealth of relationships, Valbert's unsuccessful romantic affairs are scrupulously retold to the narrator, a stranger he has just met outside of the Festspielhaus during the first intermission of the *Meistersinger*.⁵⁵ The act of recapitulation is not merely self-indulgent, rather it serves an edifying *Bildung*-like purpose, with both characters striving to solve the timeless philosophical problem: “expliquez-moi plutôt bien au juste ce que c'est que l'amour” (70), a question that may have been prompted by the *Meistersinger*'s own *Bildung* elements and explorations of youthful love. Yet, unlike *Die Meistersinger*, *Valbert* does not deliver any answers.⁵⁶ To be precise, it is a highly ironic novel that revels in undermining its main character's—and owing to autobiographical parallels, its

⁵⁴ See Pierre Quillard's contemporary review for the *Mercure de France*, which was issued shortly after the novel's publication: “Cela se lit comme les Mémoires du dix-huitième siècle, j'entends ceux qui sont écrits en bonne prose. Et n'est-ce point une joie, quand le jargon nous envahit chaque jour, de rencontrer un tel livre de libertinage élégant et attendri ?” (“Teodor de Wyzewa,” *Mercure de France* 9 (September 1893): 25). Paul Delsemme sees *Valbert* as profoundly archaic in style: “Le style, lui aussi, est d'un autre temps. Nuancé, mais sans éclat, restant toujours en deçà des sentiments évoqués, il rappelle la manière des élégiaques français du XVIIIe siècle. On est tenté de croire que par cette recherche d'archaïsme et de sobriété Wyzewa s'appliquait à atténuer le caractère personnel, presque indiscret, d'une œuvre en grande partie autobiographique” (44). Valérie Michelet-Jacquod evokes a potential reader's perplexity with respect to the concurrent influences of Wagner and eighteenth-century memoirs in *Valbert*: “on peut se demander en quoi Valbert, avec sa narration sagement ordonnée, à la manière des mémoires du XVIIIe siècle, et son discours construit comme une plaidoirie, se rattache encore à l'idéal wagnérien du roman” (38).

⁵⁵ Wyzewa's diary confirms autobiographical connections between himself and Valbert, a fellow Slav, with the actress appearing in the fourth episode being based on a real-life mistress: “J'ai d'ailleurs (...) très exactement raconté dans *Valbert* toute l'histoire de mes relations avec elle” (*Journal intime* June 4, 1903). Delsemme also speculates that the married lady from the fifth story was based on a woman with whom Wyzewa had an illegitimate son while the live-in Parisian mistress from the sixth episode was inspired by the dancer, Jane Avril (44).

⁵⁶ This omission resembles the endless delay of Jacques's stories of love in *Jacques le Fataliste*.

author's—credibility, almost plotting against him in its disclosure of unflattering details and compromising obsessions with improbable partners, such as a young boy in school and an imaginary *Amie* in the mold of Chateaubriand's Sylphide in *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. Only *Tristram Shandy* goes further in making its lead the butt of the joke.

Commenced in the immediate aftermath of the *Revue wagnérienne* in Bayreuth over the summer 1888 and finished five years later while Wyzewa was undergoing a conversion from idealistic elitism towards anti-intellectualism, *Valbert* represents a transitional work in Wyzewa's career. My contention is that its eighteenth-century framework and willful archaisms—mostly exemplified in humoristic chapter subtitles such as “Où l'on voit le chevalier Valbert s'égarer déjà dans des amours illicites”—are not ornamental; they are elements indicative of the author's irremediable disassociation from French Wagnerism.⁵⁷ In a similar way to *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, the caustic tone in *Valbert* is a marker of fundamental instability, be it philosophical, formal or ethical, its protagonist's idealism being a constant target of derision. Nevertheless, for all of the criticism, the author refuses to divulge a viable philosophical alternative with which to replace solipsism and the moral waters of the novel remain murky.

As early as the prologue, a shadow of Wagnerian doubt is cast with the titular character—the author's double—sharing his loss of faith and Pavlovian attachment to the Wagnerian temple with the narrator: “Monsieur, me dit l'inconnu [Valbert], votre cigare n'est pas éteint. Il me rappelle mon enthousiasme pour Wagner, que tous les hivers semblent amortir, et qui se rallume de lui-même dès que je reviens à Bayreuth” (66-67). The image of the cigar, a phallic symbol *par*

⁵⁷ Beginning in December 1887, Wyzewa wrote of his increasing discomfort with French Wagnerism in *La Revue indépendante*: “J’assiste, avec désolation, au lent décroissement de mon wagnérisme, que rebute tout de même ce Wagner ainsi dépecé” (*La Revue indépendante* 5 325). Such lukewarm feelings were later echoed by Dujardin in “Les représentations de Bayreuth,” an article published in August 1896, where he bemoaned the mediocrity of performers and audience: “ô madame Wagner, ô pieux wagnériens de Bayreuth, vous aurez beau faire et beau faire [sic], l’œuvre que Wagner a conçue est, telle qu’il l’a conçue, IMPOSSIBLE” (*Mercure de France* 19 (July-September 1896): 204).

excellence, is amusingly subverted once the narrator struggles with relighting it, thus foreshadowing the withering of his own Wagnerism: “Je tirai, tirai, mais mon cigare ne voulut point se rallumer” (Idem). Rather unexpectedly, this anecdotal incident has literary consequences insofar as it triggers an impromptu conversation that will form the basis of the novel. Paradoxically, it was one the narrator had been meaning to avoid at all cost. Indeed, after having already successfully escaped social assaults from fellow French Wagnerites “quelques poignées de mains, ‘oh !’ ‘ah !’ ‘quel chef-d’œuvre !’ confraternellement échangés avec nos plus aimables wagnéristes français”, his one longing is to indulge in a reverie based on the events of the first act of *Die Meistersinger*, a desire cut short by Valbert's interruption, which turns into a ten-day logorrhea.⁵⁸ (65) Already, the egoistic impulse is prevented from taking center stage and the encounter with Valbert forces the narrator to draw from his more generous impulses.

At this stage, it is possible to wonder whether Valbert's disenchantment with Wagnerian art is to be blamed on the works' lack of durability, or if his weariness has rather more to do with the state of Wagnerism in the 1890s, a time when the former cult for initiated aesthetes had begun to evolve into a more mainstream circle of admirers. With respect to the latter hypothesis, the prologue's numerous descriptions of the Festspielhaus spectators suggests that its rather affluent attendees are likely too superficial to be true Wagnerites: “la foule des dames et demoiselles de Bayreuth (...) occupées à examiner les toilettes des étrangères, afin d’être elles-mêmes vêtues à la dernière mode de Paris ou de Londres” (66).⁵⁹ With local women coveting the latest fashions from European capitals, it seems as if Wagner's grand design for the *Volk* has not withstood the test of

⁵⁸ An obvious intertextual parallel would be the short story “Le kabbaliste” by Dujardin. For a detailed discussion of the *Walküre*-based daydreaming at the end of the text, see the end of the first section of the previous chapter.

⁵⁹ Wyzewa's weariness over Bayreuth echoed Dujardin's own, as seen in the 1893 article “Les chagrins d'un vieux wagnérien.” This perception of Bayreuth as a fashionable meeting ground for chic international attendees was a widespread feeling in the 1890s.

time. The sacred hill of Bayreuth has stepped down to the frivolity of the Garnier opera house whose stairway was famously designed to showcase stylishly clad audience members.⁶⁰ As for the theory of Wagnerian works lacking in impact past their initial charms, it is explored in Valbert's own erudite survey of Wagner's entire output, itself reminiscent of Wyzewa's work for *La Revue wagnérienne*:

Ce premier acte des *Maîtres Chanteurs* était trop beau : je n'ai pas eu la force de rentrer au théâtre avant d'avoir confié à quelqu'un la profonde joie qu'il m'a causée. Combien cet acte et cette pièce tout entière sont différents du reste dans l'œuvre de Wagner ! Je crains qu'il n'y ait eu chez ce maître un conflit entre sa nature primitive, qui était d'un symphoniste brillant et sensuel, et la tendance au symbolisme que lui avaient suggérée son éducation allemande, sa haute intelligence, ses lectures et préoccupations philosophiques. De là, dans la plupart des ses œuvres, dans *Tristan*, dans *L'Anneau du Nibelung*, même dans *Parsifal*, cette espèce d'effort à dépasser son pouvoir réel qui, tout en me frappant de respect, échoue à me causer un entier plaisir. Du moins le plaisir qui me vient de ces œuvres est-il intermittent, soumis à de continuelles variations. Tel jour c'est tel acte de *Tristan* qui me paraît superbe, tel autre jour il m'ennuie. Rien de pareil dans les *Maîtres Chanteurs*. Ici Wagner s'est abandonné à sa nature de musicien. Il a fait une symphonie, la plus sensuelle de toutes, la plus chaude, la plus colorée, la plus... (69-70)

Curiously enough given Wyzewa's constant referencing of *Parsifal*, it is the *Meistersinger*—Wagner's only mature comedy—that Valbert culls from Wagner's catalogue as his greatest accomplishment. The criteria that led to this decision are of importance: a sensual and allegedly more immediately enjoyable piece of musical theatre, it is contrasted with the more intellectually ambitious and overtly sexual *Tristan*, *Ring* cycle and *Parsifal*.

Given the fact that Valbert reveals himself to be a composer shortly before launching into his Wagnerian exposé—even one who is attempting “un grand drame musical où j'essaie d'exprimer toute l'intime passion des hommes et des choses”—his predilection for the

⁶⁰ On the Garnier staircase, see “The Staircase” chapter in Heidi Brevik-Zender's *Fashioning Spaces: Mode and Modernity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris*, where she quotes Charles Garnier conjuring up images of fabric, jewelry, etc. as influences for the design of his opera house's centerpiece. (34)

Meistersinger may not be so surprising (68).⁶¹ Beyond a somewhat preposterous plot where the young protagonist, Walther von Stolzing, prepares for a singing contest and later wins it with a well-structured song, *Die Meistersinger* is very much an artist's opera with aesthetic lessons to spare. And what exactly does it teach its listeners? To foster a community of like-minded creative minds united against various aesthetico-political threats, the latter being described by Lydia Goehr:

This lesson is about the protection of integrity of the individual and the community against the constant threat of prejudice, pedantry, corruption, and unsound judgment. It is about the way music as the language of escape provides a justification for life, in so far as it is able, in Wagner words, to break 'forth from the chaos of modern civilization'. (*The Quest for Voice* 74)

As the example of Walther would prove, the opposition of nature vs. culture in *Die Meistersinger* supports the notion that intellectual knowledge and craftsmanship are too insufficient a rampart against bad taste and decay because they can all too easily become stale. In effect, it is up to spontaneity and expressive talent, combined with knowledge and craft, to fight against "the chaos of modern civilization" and help create edifying art in which the people shall readily recognize itself.

In *Valbert*, a comparable tension befalls the protagonist in his activity as a composer—torn as he is between commercial imperatives of which the waltz he lends the narrator is representative, and his grand plan for a music drama—but also in his personal life where his inability to combine both analytical and emotional sides at once is the source of much frustration. To be sure, Valbert is not just a highly cerebral figure, he is also afflicted by what he believes to be an incurable condition, one that prevents him from abandoning himself to love: "Comme il y a des hommes qui naissent sourds ou aveugles, Valbert était né *intellectuel* : aucune infirmité n'est plus terrible que

⁶¹ Like Daniel Prince, Valbert reveals himself to be untalented, that is according to the narrator: "En revanche, je lus sa valse. C'était vraiment très médiocre, sans l'ombre d'un talent. J'en fus soulagé ; il me parut que j'aimais davantage mon nouvel ami" (72).

celle-là” (91). Under these dreary conditions, the beguiling specter of Walther and other primitive heroes like Siegfried, Heracles and Parsifal hovers about and presents a welcome alternative to a lifetime of disappointments and numbness, their unabashed individuality being reminiscent of the archetype of the “Mage divin.”

Like the dual artistic and amorous synthesis present in other Symbolist narratives, naïveté and immediacy in *Valbert* are virtues to which both the titular character and the narrator aspire. And the single locus where they can be located over and over again is in Wagnerian music drama, hence their yearly pilgrimages to Bayreuth, where even the surrounding landscape and the unpretentious local community seem to entice one towards the path of righteousness. To be sure, at the close of the first episode, the reader is presented with a vision of Arcadia peopled by idealized peasant men, women and animals, a highly romanticized description that glosses over Wagner's nationalistic intentions in having chosen a rural locale for the festival.⁶² Here life and spectacle are felicitously combined in a kaleidoscope of color and figures, the sum of which soothes the mind of the onlooker in a manner emulating the workings of Schopenhauerian contemplation:

Nous nous étions mis à la fenêtre, nous convînmes que le spectacle que nous y avions était d'une beauté parfaite. En face de nous, là-bas, se dressait le théâtre de Wagner, dont les teintes d'un rouge vif s'accentuaient à merveille sur le fond vert du petit bois. A droite, des champs immenses (...) c'était Bayreuth (...) Sur la route, à nos pieds, nous voyions passer de longs chariots, traînés par de maigres bœufs : ou bien des paysans s'avançaient solennellement au pas de leurs bottes (...) Des femmes s'en retournaient aux villages, les pieds nus (...) Des oies aussi se promenaient (...) Tout cela dans un air imprégné de paix et d'oubli, que remuait par instants un léger coup de vent. Les nerfs s'arrêtaient, la pensée prenait des rythmes vagues, les images devenaient plus lointaines et plus douces, un large flot d'émotion envahissait toute l'âme. On sentait que l'univers tout entier, les hommes et les choses, avait droit désormais à une tendre pitié. (87)

⁶² The Festspielhaus, which was designed by Otto Brückwald in collaboration with Wagner and completed in 1876 was itself a *Volk*-style building, as established by Mitchell Schwarzer: “While the entrance is decorated in neo-classical garb, the huge mass awkwardly exhibits an outsized, half-timber constructional approach more commonly found on diminutive village buildings” (“The Sources of Architectural Nationalism,” *Nationalism and Architecture* 32).

The spectacle of this multitude awakens a specific feeling in the two men, one of “tender pity” allowing them to envisage all men, beasts and living things as one through compassion in a manner that seems to prepare them for *Parsifal*.⁶³

Compassion had long been an object of fascination for Wyzewa ever since the years of the *Revue wagnérienne* during which he wrote a highly experimental comparative article entitled “La religion de Richard Wagner et la religion du comte Tolstoï.” Central to this text was the thesis that both artists had reached the limits of their art form and were now to be exclusively concerned with metaphysical problems, the only field of inquiry left for them to explore.⁶⁴ Be it in Wagner's use of the neologism *Bühnenweihfestspiel* for his last music drama, *Parsifal*, or in Tolstoy's religious short stories, which were meant to be read by peasants for their moral edification, Wyzewa argued that both artists had converted from aesthetic secularism to their own mystical brand of Christianity. In their search for God, they had to abnegate their former aesthetic principles:

La seule Religion, toute la Religion, est à chercher le bonheur, le bonheur immédiat et présent, le bonheur qui s'acquiert par le Renoncement. Le Renoncement s'exerce par la Compassion, répète Wagner ; et Tolstoï ajoute : par la Compassion Agissante. (...) Mais la Compassion est, pour Wagner, le pitoyant [sic] amour, l'intime charité des cœurs, souffrant toutes les souffrances. Parsifal est le Sauveur bienheureux parce qu'il a eu pitié aux douleurs d'Amfortas. Et toujours le Maître vous dit : “Aimez, compatissez, élargissez vos âmes : à vivre toutes les âmes !” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 1 252-253)

The familiar motto “élargissez vos âmes : à vivre toutes les âmes !” is similar to the aforementioned aphorism from the *Revue indépendante*: “Aimer une femme, c'est élargir sa vie,” both of which make a connection between exercising one's empathy and enhanced art-making. Yet it is not sexual love that is distinguished as the impetus to expand the limits of our imagination and unite with

⁶³ The crucial importance of compassion in the ethics of *Parsifal* is, according to Bryan Magee, yet another remnant of Wagner's extensive readings of Schopenhauer: “It will be remembered that Schopenhauer had regarded the whole of morality as being based on compassion, and taught that this functioned independently of the intellect, consisting for each of us in an intuitive understanding that what is essential to our own nature, our noumenal self, is at one with the inner nature of everything and everybody else” (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* 396).

⁶⁴ In reading the article, one would never know that Wagner had died two years prior, in 1883.

another, rather it is sympathy that motivates our attempts at fitting another consciousness—the love object—within ours. And to Wyzewa's eyes, no other work than *Parsifal* exemplified the Schopenhauerian trajectory from self-preservation to sainthood so completely.

Since *Valbert's* protagonist—and likely, the narrator—portray themselves as refined aesthetes, it is rather fitting that the epiphany expected in the dénouement does take place on the stage with a rendition of the third act of *Parsifal*. In the wake of *Valbert's* seventh and final tale of romantic delusion, which had occupied both characters to the point that they forgot about the afternoon's performance, the two men disband in order to find their seats in the dark. And within the confines of the Bayreuthian black box, the miracle seemingly occurs:

Déjà l'on avait fait la nuit dans le théâtre, lorsque j'y entrai. Je m'efforçai d'oublier *Valbert* et le reste des choses pour recueillir une fois de plus la bienfaisante délice de cette musique surnaturelle, dont les premiers accords doucement s'exhalaient des profondeurs de l'orchestre. (...) Et à mesure que s'emmêlaient dans l'orchestre les thèmes si poignants de *Parsifal*, je voyais surgir devant moi les douloureux épisodes des récits de mon ami ; je les voyais, mais sous une lumière plus sereine et plus calme, comme si l'espérance de la Pâque prochaine eût un peu tempéré la mortelle angoisse du Vendredi Saint. N'était-ce pas un reflet de cette espérance bénie qui adoucissait la plainte du vieux Gurnemanz, la plainte de Kundry ? “Quel est donc le remède à la souffrance de *Valbert* ?” me demandais-je ; et la consolante musique me répondait : “Tu le sauras bientôt !”

Et voici que toute plainte se tut : un flot divin de caresses inonda la terre et les cieux. Tous les cœurs autour de moi s'apaisaient, pâmés d'un tendre bonheur. L'adorable jeune homme était venu ; il avait reconquis, il ramenait à Montsalvat la lance sacrée. Debout dans sa longue robe blanche, tranquille et doux, sa seule venue avait suffi pour transfigurer la nature. C'était lui que célébraient maintenant, avec mille chansons si naïves, les oiseaux, les arbres, les fleurs, et ces voix mystérieuses qui s'éveillaient dans nos âmes. (204)

Arguably, few texts of the period bear the mark of the author's practical knowledge of the Festspielhaus as much as this excerpt from *Valbert* does. Here we are presented with the unique conditions of that auditorium—its then-unusual darkness and covered pit hiding the musicians from the audience—both of which are alluded to through a reference to the “night” unfolding in

the theatre and the depths of the orchestra.⁶⁵ And soon enough, the familiar apparatus of musical description favored by French Wagnerians, highly subjective impressions intertwined with lofty themes of transcendence, is put into place with the narrator alternating between periods of distraction and exaltation.

Much like a magical vision, the long-awaited answer to Valbert's existential pain and inability to find love appears to come out of the abyss of the Festspielhaus orchestral pit. A seraphic apparition then steers him in the right direction through a demonstration of self-restraint before it performatively heals him from years of egoism through song: “Cette lance qu'il avait reconquise, c'était le symbole du bonheur, d'un immuable bonheur enfin retrouvé dans l'amour. Et en lui et autour de lui s'épanouissait l'amoureuse joie” (205). In Schopenhauerian terms, music's potential for consolation is thus accomplished and art is able to temporarily relieve mankind from suffering during the blessed moment of musical performance.⁶⁶ However, the revelation cannot be a lasting one, as music requires repetition in order to be fully processed by the listener and cannot grant a permanent state of contentment. Only sainthood, achieved through the real-life practice of askesis, can deliver ataraxy.

Although the character of Parsifal can surely be characterized as “saintly,” the imagery used by Wyzewa in his description of the singer—immaculate white clothing and almost telepathic communication with all living things—is more strictly Catholic than what Schopenhauer or Wagner had ever intended.⁶⁷ This amalgamation of disparate influences culminates in the next few

⁶⁵ The formulation is reminiscent of Dujardin's metaphysical characterization of music as “la voix profonde des choses” (*Mallarmé par un des siens* 39).

⁶⁶ See the end of § 52 of *The World as Will and Representation* where the word “Trost” or “consolation” is used to characterize music in contrast to a life of sorrow or “Qual.”

⁶⁷ Valérie Michelet-Jacquod compares him with another role-model of Wyzewa's, St. Francis of Assisi, and has inspired me to do the same in my analysis (205).

lines, which elaborate on the nature of the miracle performed by the pure fool, now recast as St. Francis of Assisi with the mention of his aureole:

Car de nouveau l'orchestre me chanta cette phrase d'une expression si profonde et si claire, la phrase sublime qui sanctifie, comme d'une auréole céleste, le dernier drame de Wagner : *Durch Mitleid Wissend, der reine Thor! le niais, l'imbécile, mais qui a le cœur pur et qui trouve toute science dans la compassion*. Oui, je savais maintenant par quelle grâce s'acquiert le seul vrai bonheur dans l'amour. Il n'est donné qu'à ceux qui dédaignent de penser et qui renoncent à eux-mêmes, pour trouver toute science dans la compassion ! (205)

In his loose translation of the German-language libretto, Wyzewa does unveil the true extent of his divergence from the source material: his Parsifal is not just sweetly innocent, he is a simple man, an “imbecile” even, but one with a kind heart whose sole source of knowledge resides in his inherent compassion.

This is not the first time *Valbert* has glorified ignorance as a virtue. Indeed, its epigraph liberally quotes from a passage from Pascal's *Pensées*, fragment 397, commonly known as the Discourse on the Machine, or “wager”: “Cela vous abêtira. — Mais c'est ce que je crains. — Et pourquoi ? Qu'avez-vous à y perdre ?” (63) As is the case with the Wagnerian translation, the text is not quite faithful to the original and conveniently obfuscates the issue of religious faith, which is present with the removed verb “croire”: “Naturellement même cela vous fera croire et vous abêtira” (*Œuvres complètes* II 680). The excerpt is part of a longer discussion on the concept of infinity, which includes God, and the question of how we can cultivate our faith in Him in spite of our inability to justify our belief intellectually: “S'il y a un Dieu, il est infiniment incompréhensible, puisque, n'ayant ni parties ni bornes, il n'a nul rapport à nous. (...) Dieu est ou il n'est pas ; mais de quel côté pencherons-nous ? La raison n'y peut rien déterminer. (...) Que gagerez-vous ?” (677) By stepping out of a rational demonstration *à la* Descartes, Pascal is able to provide a practical answer to this insoluble problem: in order to reinforce our certainty in God's existence, we have to perform daily rituals, such as attending mass and sprinkling holy water on ourselves, all of which

bodily acts override the intellect. Only in repeating these simple gestures enough times can we “diminish our passions,” thereby becoming well-regulated automata, or, in Cartesian terms, animals, hence the reference to “s'abêtir”/turning into a “stupid” beast.

If Wyzewa, a born intellectual himself, was likely all too aware of the impossibility of turning against his skeptical nature and willing himself into a believing machine, he did not cease to be fascinated by the possibility of “abêtissement,” which was to make regular appearances in other texts, most strikingly in his last novel *Le Cahier rouge*, where the grieving protagonist seeks consolation in Catholic genuflection and prayer despite being a confirmed atheist. Yet for all of his obsession with the ideal of naïveté, Wyzewa never composed “simple” texts, and unlike Walther in *Meistersinger* did not pursue stylistic immediacy. In contrast to Tolstoy who went on to become his literary and spiritual lodestar in later years, Wyzewa never contemplated relinquishing his earthly possessions and went on to publish many learned articles on foreign literature for *La Revue des Deux Mondes*.⁶⁸

This self-contradiction, which is already present in *Valbert*, is in fact only too palpable in the epilogue. One year past the events of the prologue and Valbert's subsequent retelling of his life story over the course of ten days, both men meet again at the Bayreuth festival. Rather surprisingly, it is quickly revealed that Valbert has found love, but he now suffers from an actual physical

⁶⁸ Critics who detected the first signs of anti-intellectualism in Wyzewa were left dumbfounded by this unexpected philosophical conversion, as Maurice Spronck suggested in an article he dedicated to Wyzewa's career in 1895: “Ses conceptions de philosophe et de moraliste, à les envisager à ce seul point de vue documentaire, restent donc inattaquables; à les considérer en soi, ce qui fait au fond leur irrémédiable faiblesse, c'est qu'elles émanent d'un cerveau qui, en dépit des efforts accomplis, demeure quand même un cerveau d'intellectuel, d'idéaliste, d'idéologue. Lorsque l'écrivain se figure renoncer aux chimères artificielles qu'enfante sa pensée en délire, il les remplace simplement par d'autres chimères qui ne s'adaptent pas mieux que les précédentes aux possibilités d'ici-bas; il persiste à agir fictivement, en dehors des réalités concrètes; il continue à refaire le monde selon sa fantaisie intime et sans se douter qu'il vit au milieu d'apparences évoquées par son imagination” (*Le Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* July 11, 1895).

illness, likely an advanced form of consumption.⁶⁹ Much like des Esseintes, once he has enjoyed a taste of totality in his life, he self-destructs.

A changed man, Valbert's face is hollowed out by malady, his eyes are now glass orbs and his whole body quakes with a deep cough that irritates fellow concert-goers during a performance of *Meistersinger*. Yet he is unreservedly happy and convinced, in a rather animistic manner, that he was struck by a miracle during his previous Bayreuth sojourn as if the *Karfreitagszauber* music from the third act of *Parsifal* had indeed been a locus for moral revelation: “Et à peine l'orchestre eut-il joué, ce soir-là, les premières harmonies du *Vendredi Saint*, qu'une surnaturelle lumière se répandit en moi” (209). In face of such radiant faith in art and music belied by irrepressible bodily decay, the narrator cannot repress his horror:

Et je vis, avec une joie mêlée d'épouvante, que Valbert disait vrai. Il était heureux. Le bonheur rayonnait dans ses gros yeux transparents. Le sourire de ses lèvres pâlies s'était comme purifié de toute amertume, pour devenir désormais un doux sourire plein d'espérance et de vie. Son blême visage d'agonisant m'apparaissait à présent si calme, si gai, si parfumé d'allégresse qu'une jalousie secrète me mordit au cœur. Avec sa toux, avec ses joues creusées et ses poumons déchirés, Valbert était follement, divinement heureux ! (208)

Once again, the Symbolist novel does not let its hero off the hook: if Valbert did indeed have an epiphany, he is to take his secret off to the grave. In learning the secret of sainthood, he is to experience pseudo-martyrdom.

All that remains at the end of the novel is the lingering impression of profound dissonance between the protagonist's belief in music-induced ethical transformation and his sure death: “Ami, disait-il, vous me croyez malade, et moi je suis tout au bonheur de me sentir guéri” (209). In Philippe Berthier's rather Derridian assessment of the final pages of *Valbert*, the ethical ambiguity

⁶⁹ The connection made by Wyzewa between sensory apotheosis occurring in the opera house and the character's subsequent illness also appears in the almost contemporary *Monsieur Teste* (1896) by Paul Valéry, where Starobinski sees a connection between Teste's visit to the opera—where his intensity as a listener enralls the narrator—and the later bed scene: “l'envers précis de cet état de gloire” (“Monsieur Teste face à la douleur” 98).

at the core of the Wagnerian project and its dubious potential to educate the *Volk* is made apparent precisely through the presence of a deadly illness: “Wagner empoisonneur, Wagner guérisseur : telle la lance de Montsalvat, seule à pouvoir cicatriser les blessures qu'elle a faites, il y a dans sa musique l'ambivalence immémoriale du *pharmakon*” (*Toxicologie wagnérienne* 104). Upon second glance, what becomes apparent is that such a polarization between healthy vs. deadly art not only seems to have been taken out of Nietzsche's anti-Wagnerian playbook, it also underpins the entire novel and may in fact be its ethical core.⁷⁰

Going back to the opening sentence, we are presented with an idyllic picture of the Bayreuthean surroundings with a mention of the fresh air enjoyed by festival attendees: “un petit vent parfumé descend tout exprès des collines pour calmer les nerfs” (65). But soon enough, the zephyr takes on a more menacing character: one of Valbert's lovers, the innocent-looking daughter of his Bayreuth landlord, is depicted as a youthful seductress determined to bed him because she was likely driven by a “funeste vent de démence [qui l'] avait jetée dans mon lit” (189). Metaphorically, it seems as if the locals are possessed by the demon of consumerism, and so are the concert-goers. The conclusion is unambiguous: as Wagner's high hopes for his art and theatre are crumbling, the gentle breeze turns deadly, much like the musical sirocco evoked by Nietzsche in *The Case of Wagner*, later recycled by Thomas Mann in *Tod in Venedig* (1912), where the hot wind is a vector of cholera.⁷¹

⁷⁰ The first French translation of *The Case of Wagner* came out the same year as *Valbert*, in 1893, and it is unknown whether or not Wyzewa had access to the original German text. Coincidentally, Wyzewa was one of the first French intellectuals to have perceived Nietzsche's magnitude as a philosopher, prophetically writing in *La Revue bleue* in 1891: “En France, personne ne le connaît; mais j'ai la certitude que le jour où il y sera connu, son action sera aussi vive, et son renom aussi fort que dans les autres pays. Car la jeunesse française, mécontente des dieux qui ont suffi à ses aînés, aspire vers un dieu inconnu ; et personne n'a autant que Nietzsche les qualités qui conviennent pour remplir cet office” (*La Revue bleue* 48 (November 7, 1891) 586). Note the reference to “dieu,” which is seemingly reminiscent of “le dieu Richard Wagner,” as celebrated by the January 1886 sonnets published in the *Revue wagnérienne*.

⁷¹ See the beginning of *The Case of Wagner*, which I cited in the introduction. Like Nietzsche, Valbert sweats a lot while listening to Wagner's music, likely due to his fatal illness.

Alongside the debasement of Wagner, his art, and his festival, the ironic ending of *Valbert* stages another reversal of fortune: the dream of a lifelike novel Wyzewa had called for in the 1880s was still out of reach and likely never to come to fruition.⁷² Yet it is precisely *Valbert's* dark humor that saves it from the pitfalls of nihilism, proposing to reinvent the trope of the “Mage Divin” instead of denouncing it as a childish fantasy of self-aggrandizement. From the Promethean figure who promised to “brise[r] la résistance du Néant à l’Idée créatrice,” the figure of the creator in *Valbert* takes on the guise of a failed composer on the verge of dying, one mirroring an author who found his writing inadequate, as he later confessed in his diary: “Hélas ! je n’ose point te dire combien j’y [in *Valbert*] ai trouvé de phrases mal écrites et de pensées enfantines !” (January 13, 1903).⁷³ This dual failure—of the protagonist and the author—cast a long shadow on Wyzewa’s entire career and became part of a wider questioning of his former aesthetic theories and exegetic methods, some of which he exposed in an 1896 collection of articles entitled *Nos Maîtres*, a text that officially marked his transition to anti-intellectualism, although the seeds were apparent in *Valbert*.

There, he bemuses the reader from the very first page, declaring in a self-deprecating manner: “dans les cafés du Quartier Latin, je perdais ma jeunesse à vouloir résoudre les insolubles problèmes de l’art et de la vie” (I). But unlike in *Valbert*, here he seeks to reassure us, having found

⁷² This statement may need to be nuanced somewhat as by 1893, the year of *Valbert's* publication, Wyzewa may have still believed in Mallarmé’s ability to create the long-awaited *Le Livre*. Back in 1885, Wyzewa did designate Mallarmé as the rightful successor to Wagner, the one who would surpass the composer in designing the true total work of art: “Oui, Wagner a fait l’œuvre attendu, l’hymen prédestiné: oui, il l’a fait par un compromis, et seulement en jongleur, par la transformation provisoire d’un néant, sous son harmonie; oui, il a, fautivement, traduit des légendes; oui - et bien [illegible] sur lui le dernier jugement—il a,—plutôt qu’un clairvoyant suicide stérile !—envoyé à tout, musicien, ce que doit réaliser, seul, le Littérateur. Et l’art qui, au lieu de son art, vous rêvez, Monsieur, et si nettement, en cette esquisse, évoquez encore, est superbement logique” (Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet MVL 3229 1.2./4).

⁷³ The “tu” in this excerpt refers back to Wyzewa’s wife, Marguerite, who died of consumption in August 1901. Wyzewa was never to remarry and raised their daughter, Isabelle, along with his mother and Vincentine. Isabelle went on to study at Columbia University and published a doctoral dissertation partially dedicated to the study of her father’s works, entitled: *La Revue wagnérienne, essai sur l’interprétation esthétique de Wagner en France* (1934).

an alternative to the solipsism of his youth: “Aujourd'hui comme il y a dix ans, je place la beauté au-dessus du reste des choses. Je me suis seulement accoutumé à ne plus exiger d'elle rien d'autre qu'elle-même, de telle sorte que je n'ai plus besoin désormais, pour en jouir, qu'elle soit neuve, ni étrange, ni que nul avant moi ne s'en soit ému” (II). It appears as if by renouncing originality as an aesthetic criterion, Wyzewa had indeed liberated himself from the pressures of realizing the total artwork and was now free to embrace the conservatism that had always been part of his critical work.⁷⁴ By 1894, he had aligned himself with Ferdinand Brunetière of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, broadcasting his conversion to neo-Catholicism in the collection of biblical stories *Contes Chrétiens* (1902), and siding with anti-Dreyfusards.⁷⁵

Wyzewa's embrace of his traditionalist tendencies notably extended to his musical tastes. From ardent Wagnerite, he morphed into a musicologist who specialized in 18th-century piano music by Clementi, Mozart and Haydn. In 1897, on the occasion of a conference dedicated to Mozart, he was even proud to describe himself as a reactionary man and thinker, thus knitting both political and musical poles closely together:

Je vous déclarerai donc qu'en matière de musique, comme d'ailleurs en matière de peinture et peut-être un peu de littérature, j'ai le malheur d'être profondément, passionnément, effroyablement réactionnaire. Réactionnaire, ou vieux-jeu, ou pompier, suivant le nom qu'il vous plaira de donner à cette maladie. Mais j'en suis atteint à un degré qui m'effare moi-même. (*Beethoven et Wagner* 238-239)

And yet Wyzewa continued to write about Wagner periodically, mostly for publications such as *Le Temps* et *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, where he reviewed numerous works of criticism

⁷⁴ In spite of the supposed ideological divide between the years of the *Revue wagnérienne* and later articles featured in *Nos Maîtres*, Wyzewa had long been anti-democratic, as the following excerpt from a 1887 *Revue indépendante* literary column would attest: “Aussi bien, à notre pauvre langage français, aujourd'hui anéanti sous les démocratiques mésusages, seule peut secourir cette restitution des proses latines, correctement logiques, soucieuses de l'ordre des idées et de la signification expresse des vocables” (*La Revue indépendante* 4 152). For more details, see my introduction.

⁷⁵ Here it should be noted that Wyzewa was not just a conservative, but a reactionary anti-Semite who did not express his bigotry publically, but rather in his diary. For more information, see Delsemme (93).

dedicated to Wagner all the way until 1913. These later essays testify to Wyzewa's conservatism as a Wagnerian—in a couple of texts from 1894 and 1896 dedicated to the Bayreuth festival, he espoused the views of Cosima Wagner and defended the need to do Wagner's original intentions justice—and his growing interest in the composer's biography.⁷⁶ In actuality, none of these texts comes close to being theoretical or exegetic and are thus of little interest to this chapter.

And yet, their author's growing devotion for the biographical genre can yield important insights vis-à-vis his novelistic career and Symbolist prose efforts. At the turn of the century, Wyzewa's passion for Mozart drove him to write a painstakingly complete French biography of the composer, which he published in two volumes—only covering the years 1756 to 1777—in 1912.⁷⁷ This work is especially notable because it represents the next logical step for Wyzewa, who had criticized the imperfection of *Les Lauriers*, citing the vacuity of its protagonist and his dull inner life, made of “états d’esprit fort simples; (...) grosses alternances de sensation confuses et robustes et d’une passion fougueusement froide” (*La Revue libre* May 1888 76). His assessment of his own novel, *Valbert* was not much kinder, as he disclosed in a passage from his diary: “C'est un roman bizarre, prétentieux, inutile, affreusement inutile,” a desperate statement he was quick to correct in order to save face: “j'en ai eu (...) une impression bien meilleure que je n'avais pensé” (*Journal* July 16, 1903). Nevertheless, I would like to hold on to this adjective “inutile” because it hints at something much deeper than personal dissatisfaction, implying that Wyzewa had lost his belief in fiction after having put the aesthetics he exposed in the *Revue wagnérienne* to the test. With his magnum opus, the Mozart biography, Wyzewa believed he could remedy the obvious

⁷⁶ See, for instance, “Les représentations de Bayreuth et la presse allemande” (*Le Temps* August 31, 1894) and “L'Anneau du Nibelung à Bayreuth” (*L'Illustration* August 29, 1896). Here he opposed Dujardin who mocked Wagner's “oeil bête” and derided the visuals featured in Bayreuth productions.

⁷⁷ The biography was written in collaboration with Georges de Saint-Foix who completed the remaining tomes after Wyzewa's passing.

problems he found in *Les Lauriers*—namely, a lack of psychological depth—and *Valbert*, where self-irony threatens to overwhelm the novel's more sincere moments. His conviction was that he could finally write a text that could be just as informative as it would be full of life, conveying an immediate three-dimensional picture of Mozart as a person and artist.

There again, he experienced failure. In perhaps one of the most touching excerpts from his diary, he lamented:

Plus je vais, et plus j'aperçois la difficulté, ou plutôt la profonde impossibilité, de la biographie artistique telle que je l'ai rêvée, de loin, toute ma vie, telle que j'ai vingt fois reproché aux autres de ne l'avoir point faite. La vérité est qu'elle est impossible, impossible à écrire, impossible à lire. L'esprit ne s'accommode pas de ce mélange du récit et de la critique : il n'admet pas qu'on passe continuellement d'une anecdote à une théorie, qu'après avoir exposé les embarras d'argent des Mozart, on étudie les influences qui ont inspiré les premières sonates. Et je patauge misérablement à la poursuite d'un objet que je sais d'avance être hors de ma portée... (*Journal intime* February 26, 1904)

Outside of Mallarmé's crisis letters from 1866, where he described his encounter with the abyss to Henri Cazalis, this is the most striking statement I was able to find on the impossibility for a Symbolist writer to realize the mirage of totality. In Wyzewa's case, my contention is that this illusion was connected all the way back to Wagner because the discovery of his works had prompted him to come up with the tripartite structure of the human mind and inspired him to explore various forms of synthesis in fiction. Although he had let go of the fantasy of artistic synthesis by the 1900s, the Mozart biography forced him to give up on the desire to achieve a form of psychological synthesis, by which I mean Wyzewa's attempts to include such information as the musical works Mozart had heard and played, or his speculation on the conditions in which Mozart may have created his own. The result is a text that is so inclusive as to discourage anyone outside of Mozart's staunchest admirers from undertaking the task of reading it.

I would like to conclude with a quick foray into Wyzewa's last novel, *Le Cahier rouge*, which seems to invert some of the themes previously examined in *Valbert*. Another highly

autobiographical text, *Le Cahier rouge's* protagonist, Etienne Brichet, is a composer—this time, a talented one—who has just lost his wife and details his memories of her and the pain of his present existence in a notebook, the eponymous *cahier rouge*.⁷⁸ After having received the visit of a young Italian man, the brother of an old flame named Paola, Brichet reminisces on his first encounter with her, an event that notably took place in Bayreuth, eight years earlier:

Pauvre Paola ! Quelle vision lointaine, et combien touchante ! C'était à Bayreuth, la seconde année de *Parsifal*. Un soir, au restaurant du théâtre (...) j'étais en train de manger un sandwich et de boire un verre de bière en compagnie de mon camarade A., qui, comme à peu près tout le reste de mes confidents de jeunesse, s'en est allé bien avant son heure. Excité par la musique, après le premier acte de *Parsifal*, j'épanchais avec ma franchise et mon entrain habituels de ce temps-là mon opinion sur l'acte susdit en particulier, et en général sur toute l'œuvre musicale de Wagner : car je dois bien avouer que mon enthousiasme passionné pour cette œuvre n'a jamais cessé de décroître depuis le jour où je l'ai vraiment connue, — après avoir atteint, jusque-là, des proportions incroyables. Je disais donc, et tout haut, à mon cher A., combien j'apercevais de mauvais goût, tout ensemble, et quasi d'habileté déloyale dans un art qui avait pour caractère dominant d'exercer sur l'auditeur une espèce de suggestion ou de fascination sensuelle, l'empêchant de comprendre et de juger en pleine liberté. Des fins d'actes merveilleuses, ou plutôt irrésistiblement captivantes ; et puis, avant ce gros effet final, un bruit d'assez fâcheux aloi, dépourvu d'émotion tout de même que de beauté, mais ayant pour soi cette propriété mystérieuse de nous plonger dans un état d'engourdissement respectueux. Si bien que ce soir-là, en particulier, je me rappelle que je révélais sans l'ombre de scrupule à mon ami mon incapacité de toujours à admirer, voire à tenir simplement pour existant, tout le rôle du criard et insupportable Amfortas. (83-84)

With this new *Parsifal* reference, it is tempting to compare this passage with *Valbert* and observe the changes made between 1893 and 1917 as testament of Wyzewa's shifting position with respect to Wagner and Wagnerism. First of all, the reverence demonstrated by *Valbert* and the narrator vis-à-vis the third act is now replaced by a biting critique of the first, which Brichet finds too preoccupied with the emotional manipulation and sexual titillation of the spectators.⁷⁹ Moreover, Amfortas, the tragic figure who made such a noble appearance in Dujardin's paraphrase, is revealed

⁷⁸ Although the title is reminiscent of Benjamin Constand's novel of the same name (1807), there are no thematic connections between Wyzewa's and Constand's narratives.

⁷⁹ Once again, Wyzewa echoes Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner* and its denunciation of Wagner as sexually decadent.

to be no better than a screaming toddler whose existential drama over the loss of the spear has been downgraded to his vexation over having to share his favorite toy. Here the imposture is only too apparent: Wagner is in fact no hieratic priest of a higher art form, but rather a provincial German businessman whose family is all too happy to make a profit off of beer and sandwiches eaten by the voracious international horde of so-called pilgrims. This moral deceit does not limit itself to the Wagner family, it also has repercussions on Brichet's personal ethics. Indeed, shortly after his outburst, he begins an adulterous love affair with the aforementioned Paola, the wife of a leading Italian Wagnerite who had invited the Frenchman to their home to further discuss their common interest in all things Wagner.⁸⁰

It is not a coincidence that *Le Cahier rouge*, a novel primarily concerned with mourning, would drive the final nail in the Wagnerian coffin. Already, with its dedication to the victims of the First World War and their grieving families, the reader is notified that there has been a change in world order with both the author and the protagonist being too ill-equipped to face it. In the preface, we learn of Etienne Brichet's desperation and his attempts to use confessional writing as a form of therapy: “Etienne Brichet était un musicien de mes amis, qui naguère, après la mort d'une jeune femme tendrement aimée, avait essayé de se consoler en déversant, chaque soir, sur les pages d'une espèce de ‘journal’ intime le trop-plein de ses sentiments et de ses pensées” (I). This outpouring of raw unresolved pain saturates the narrative, and is frequently mirrored, sometimes also exacerbated, in Brichet's musical practice, both as a composer and as a piano-player demonstrating a great fondness for Mozart and Clementi. At a time of great need, where music

⁸⁰ The adulterous plot was likely inspired by Wagner's life and the many instances in which he began illicit relationships with the wives of his protectors and collaborators, most notoriously in the case of Mathilde Wesendonck—who inspired him to write *Tristan und Isolde*—and Cosima von Bülow who went on to carry his children out of wedlock before they were able to marry in 1870. As Wyzewa did show in a series of sympathetic articles dedicated to the betrayed first wife (published in *Le Temps* (December 8, 1912 and January 5, 1913)), Minna Wagner, he deeply disapproved of Wagner's sexual transgressions.

may provide much-needed consolation, the presence of Wagner in the novel is too anecdotal to be noted outside of the rant at the Bayreuth festival, which significantly did occur prior to Brichet's marriage. His Wagnerism is unmasked as a mere adolescent phase that cannot provide solace in the aftermath of the war and the loss of his wife and child. In the end, the enchantment of the miraculous third act of *Parsifal* in *Valbert* has indeed vanished and old-world certainties, like the Catholic religion, are the only straws at which the protagonist can grasp during the transition of his country into modernity.

Conclusion:

In my introduction, I suggested that the *Revue wagnérienne* and the works of literature associated with it were instrumental not only in establishing the aesthetic tenets of Symbolism but also in propelling French literature into modernity. In these last few pages, I will open a few more doors into what that might mean and will do so with relevant examples from twentieth-century literature.

My critical reading of *Le Roi vierge* demonstrated just how multifaceted a novel it is beyond the shimmering surface of its entertaining peripeteia and fin-de-siècle lexicon. In chapter 1, I argued that this 1881 text yielded important insights for what came to be known as Symbolism five years later in the pages of *La Revue wagnérienne* and *Le Figaro* with Jean Moréas's manifesto. Although Mendès showed remarkable prescience in modeling his protagonist after Ludwig II and giving him a spectacular death, the novel is most noteworthy because of its critique of aesthetic idealism, hinting at its potential to be so absolute in its demands as to lead artists into a deadly impasse.

This was exactly the issue encountered by the Symbolists in their attempts to improve on Wagner's innovations without recourse to music, in other words, of striving to capture a taste of totality in their writings. From the dismal reception that welcomed *Les Lauriers sont coupés*'s unprecedented detailing of a single man's personal thoughts to Wyzewa's attempts to surpass Dujardin's imperfect novel with a biography that would convey as accurate an impression of Mozart as possible, all of these texts proved to be profoundly disappointing to their authors. Perhaps feeling dismayed by the *Revue wagnérienne*'s demise in 1888 and multiple commercial failures in the fictional realm, both Dujardin and Wyzewa reinvented themselves and distanced themselves from Symbolism, the first becoming a horse-racing bookie, the second a conservative

literary journalist and translator. Their defection coincided with the official end of Symbolism as a movement, which died down by the mid-1890s, with its official founder Jean Moréas establishing a new “École romane.”

However, Mendès's subtle criticism of his peers' worship of the absolute was a lesson that fell on dead ears in 1881. And yet, some of its talking points were indirectly taken up again by Jacques Rivière in a foundational text of French Modernism, “Le roman d'aventure” (1913). There, he began his indictment of Symbolism with a negative definition that stressed its growing irrelevance, declaring it to be “un art de décadence, un fruit paradoxal et pourri produit par une sève presque épuisée” (*NRf* May 1913 748). Once again, the key concept of decadence makes an appearance, recalling Nietzsche's diatribes against Wagner. Further, Rivière painted a lifeless picture of the average Symbolist, arguing that these poets were unable to take part in real-life activities: “Le monde sensible s'était réduit en une tapisserie légendaire, ornée de motifs noblement fantastiques, et qui semblait tendue sur les parois intérieures du cerveau. Les gens qui vivaient au milieu de ce rêve, naturellement ne pouvaient goûter que des plaisirs tout idéaux” (761). On the surface, this description befits Frédéric as much as it does Daniel Prince and Valbert, but it does not withstand closer scrutiny once we raise the question of Wagner and how it was treated in these novels. After all, Dujardin's “Le kabbaliste” subtly indicated that its protagonist's preference for daydreaming was pathological and could not capture the experience of seeing *Die Walküre* live on the stage. Frédéric's mode of listening to Wagner in *Le Roi vierge* was just as obviously mistaken. In Symbolist prose narratives, these “plaisirs tout idéaux” are thus frequently put on trial and ridiculed as self-indulgent temptations.

Yet this self-irony has been minimized by critics of Symbolism. Instead, Proust preferred to condemn its dual linguistic and philosophical “obscurity” while Rivière decried its authors'

incessant self-analysis, which led to “abnormal” works interspersed with “de délicates lignes destructrices” (751). It is this latter dimension, that of self-destructive tendencies, which is linked to the crippling narcissism of Symbolist protagonists as much as their pathological rapport to women and sex. However, this mélange of unsavory characteristics hides a more productive form of uncompromising self-criticism, which manifests itself in highly tentative formal experiments, for instance with Dujardin's interior monologue, or with Gourmont's novel within the novel “L'Adorant” in *Sixtine*. Thus, self-deprecation and aesthetic innovation go hand in hand to unveil the uncertainty at Symbolism's very core. Both point to contradictory religious beliefs—neo-Catholicism happily coexisting with occultism—and an ambiguous attitude vis-à-vis Wagner, whom they wished to imitate without becoming epigones.

Villiers's short story, “Le secret de l'ancienne musique,” is even more radical in this handling of that uncertainty. Unlike Mendès, who seemed to suggest that the best way of dealing with Wagner was to poke fun at him and reinterpret his works at will, Villiers elected to disengage and remain silent. In doing so, he implied that some things—like Wagnerian music—cannot be adequately conveyed by verbal language. Just as the virtuoso's silent performance leads to a personal and collective triumph because it is savored without questioning, the moment he expresses his personal opinion on the music, he ruins the silent magic he created. I interpret this short text as a wider reflection not just on Wagner but on the delicate problem posed by the verbal description of music, with the final conclusion being that Villiers preferred to abstain from writing about Wagner precisely because he felt unable to do his works justice with mere words. As he later demonstrated in his plays *Le Nouveau monde* and *Axël*, he was in fact capable of a musical answer. Sadly, very few traces of Villiers's music have subsisted because he did not couch these musical ideas on paper.

Many years later, a young writer by the name of Samuel Beckett faced a similar task in having to craft a work of literature under the overwhelming shadow of his master, James Joyce. In his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), he conjured up two of his favorite artists not because he wanted to replicate their exploits but rather because he admired their ability to carve out moments of silence in their music: “I was speaking of something of which you have and can have no knowledge, the incoherent continuum as expressed by, say, Rimbaud and Beethoven. (...) The terms of whose statements serve merely to delimit the reality of insane areas of silence, whose audibilities are no more than punctuation in a statement of silences” (102). In the case of Wagner, it might seem paradoxical, not to say unthinkable, to imagine similar instances in a music that is so often described as belligerent. After all, most listeners recall the *Ride of the Valkyries* from *Die Walküre* over the more delicate passages of the same opera like Siegmund's “Winterstürme” monologue. Suffice to say that all music includes pauses and caesuras for purposes of balance, including Wagner's. Furthermore, I could venture into pointing out that when Villiers, Mendès, Dujardin and Wyzewa heard Wagner's music in Germany, they may have been just as struck by the quiet buzzing from the prelude to *Das Rheingold*, or Siegmund and Sieglinde drinking together in silence and falling in love without telling one another, as the louder moments. Perhaps these quieter excerpts fuelled their imagination and led them to think of Wagner's works not just as extraordinary musical and narrative structures but as chamber dramas defined by the monologues of their lead characters. After all, this was exactly the vision proposed by Dujardin when he argued that the entire *Ring* cycle revolved around Wotan's person in the article “Richard Wagner et la poésie française contemporaine,” an idea that was likely a contributing factor in his invention of the interior monologue for *Les Lauriers sont coupés*.

The case for *Les Lauriers*'s impact on Modernism has been made many times by specialists of British and Irish Modernism, starting with Melvin Friedman and C.D. King in the 1950s. In their analyses, they were following the lead provided by James Joyce himself, claiming that Dujardin's novel had been a major source of influence for both *Ulysses* and stream-of-consciousness narratives. Rather than establishing a filiation between *Les Lauriers* and *Ulysses*, I would like to briefly mention one French text that bears the obvious mark of Dujardin's experiment and improves on some of its weaknesses, a novella by Valéry Larbaud entitled *Mon plus secret conseil...* (1923) which belongs to the collection *Amants, heureux amants*.

Dedicated to Dujardin, whom he had come to know personally thanks to Joyce, this text begins with a few controversial first lines that place some distance between Larbaud and a literary tradition he both embraced and sought to prevail over: “‘Et si je la ramenais à son mari ?’ Ça c'est du monologue de théâtre, une de ces choses qu'il se surprenait à dire, ou même seulement à penser, pour des spectateurs imaginaires” (159). Although *Amants, heureux amants* is filled with nods to seventeenth-century literature, which is often considered to be the golden age of French theater, I take the reference to theatrical monologues as an allusion to turn-of-the-century critics, who failed to understand just how unique interior monologue was as a literary form and conflated it with regular soliloquies at the theater. This tendency was exemplified by Charles Le Goffic, who wrote of *Les Lauriers*: “si vous n'arrivez pas avec un programme comme celui-là à confectionner un monologue pour Coquelin cadet, je dis que vous n'aurez point été fidèle à votre programme” (*Les Romanciers d'aujourd'hui* 124). Yet it could also be argued that Larbaud may have been critical of Dujardin and Symbolism, despite the dedication, and alluded to the theater in order to point to Dujardin's faults in *Les Lauriers*, where Daniel Prince is constantly performing for others instead of being fully sincere to himself. Indeed, *Mon plus secret conseil...* seems to be taking *Les Lauriers*

to task by forcing its protagonist to mostly remain inside a train compartment instead of wandering the streets of Naples and the various Italian cities he intends to visit. With this newfound physical stasis and fewer distractions, the performing aspect is reduced to a minimum. Consequently, the reader is granted more profound insights into the state of a disintegrating romantic relationship—a real one, this time around—although he/she will be refused a sense of closure, as the protagonist falls asleep before making a decision about the future.

In 1957, Michel Butor was to build upon these foundations with *La Modification*, a novel that also takes place in a train and innovates with its ground-breaking use of the pronoun “vous,” which seems to both alienate and include the reader in its reach. As a novel, *La Modification* takes *Les Lauriers*'s special attention to interiority one step further, establishing that a protagonist's inner life can indeed be worthy of literary treatment and hold the reader's attention for the duration of its three-hundred pages. Unlike *Les Lauriers* and *Mon plus secret conseil*, however, it accomplishes this feat by making various well-timed disclosures, redefining interior monologue as *inner journey*. In the end, the unnamed forty-five-year-old has indeed been “modified,” the weight of his recent epiphany coloring his vision of himself and leading to the promise of writing a book documenting the personal revelation he has undergone during his voyage to Rome.

And finally, there is the question of just what *Valbert* may have influenced. After all, this was a novel that enjoyed a very limited following and is still little read today. In my estimation, beyond its Wagnerian content, it is interesting because of how little this text seems to fit into preconceptions many critics share about fin-de-siècle novels. Although Valérie Michelet-Jacquod has been keen to emphasize *Valbert*'s status as a Symbolist prose narrative, I only partially agree with that reading. Rather, I take *Valbert* to be a conservative post-Symbolist text that adumbrates twentieth-century *arrière-gardes*, a concept that has been expanded upon by William Marx and

includes all the “posts” and “neos” of post-Symbolism, neo-Realism, etc. (“The 20th Century: Century of the Arrière-Garde?” 61). Although the term carries negative connotations of the kind we tend to associate with anything reactionary, Wyzewa's novel proved the general validity of an approach that appropriated eighteenth-century form in order to respond to modern preoccupations such as the relationship of the arts with mental/physical health. In other words, he used a form of pastiche in order to give more weight to his critique, a technique later honed by Proust, who parodied the Goncourt Brothers in *Le Temps retrouvé* in order to indict the Realist school.

Despite its reputation as an “obscure” movement that made a show of its linguistic “préciosités,” it could be said that one of the greatest achievements of Symbolism was its awareness of its limited creative means and the impossibility of fulfilling its absolute artistic vision. It is this clash of aspiration vs. literary practice I have attempted to illuminate throughout this dissertation through the extreme example of Wagner, an artist whose triple accomplishments—in theory, poetry and music—were never to be replicated again on so vast a scale. By attempting to follow suit and failing to write music (Dujardin and Villiers), practice what they preached (Wyzewa), or embrace all genres with equal success (Mendès and Dujardin), the Symbolists were courageously pursuing the chimera of artistic totality. What I would like to suggest is that they knew their Wagnerian literature ideal to be not just a pipe dream but rather an impossibility. And yet they enjoyed contemplating such a paradoxical object as “Wagnerian literature” because they hoped it would lead to self- and collective improvement, to writing literature that would get ever closer to the all-encapsulating ideal. Their long-felt impact on the next generation of writers, from Larbaud to Beckett, proves that they were at least partially successful because they challenged the safe confines of literature as an art form and pushed its philosophical ambitions further.

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