

These are however minor concerns. This book has been written with warmth and enthusiasm underpinned by exhaustive research. Setting out as a record of the everyday working life of an individual professional musician, it is ultimately an important biography of an exceptional man.

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Julian Young, *The Philosophies of Richard Wagner* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014). xix + 149 pp. £52.95

Julian Young's study is – as the title states – a comprehensive introduction to different stages of Richard Wagner's thinking. In contrast to previous literature on Wagner's writings, however, Young's survey is not restricted to Wagner's aesthetic outlook and the various changes it underwent throughout his life. Rather, it explores Wagner's general philosophy, including his critique of the state, of capitalist economy and of culture, as well as his theories concerning the decline of art since ancient Greek tragedy – as Young aptly calls it: Wagner's 'Greek Ideal'. The first three chapters of Young's analysis meticulously summarize the lesser-known aspects of Wagner's youthful socialist agenda and its manifold implications for his concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* ('collective artwork'). Young explores Wagner's reasoning in great detail and shows how political ideas of his revolutionary period directly shaped his artistic outlook, and vice versa. Young does not divide Wagner's thinking into distinct, unrelated categories – aesthetics, politics, culture, etc. – but rather traces the subtle mutual influences among these entangled intellectual territories, thereby making the first three chapters of his book particularly valuable.

However, in suggesting that there is a virtually universal lack of scholarly discussion on Wagner's thinking apart from aesthetic issues or his musical dramas (p. xiv), Young overstates the case, thereby undermining his own call for more serious research on Wagner's cultural, political and social stances. Whereas Anglophone publications devoted primarily to Wagner's philosophy might be rare,¹ German scholarship on Wagner's writings has produced numerous studies on these facets of Wagner's worldview.² Given Young's vast expertise in German

¹ In his short list of thematically relevant books, Young misses studies like David Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner: An Examination and Analysis of his Major Aesthetic, Political, Economic, Social, and Religious Thoughts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), Roger Hollinrake, *Nietzsche, Wagner, and the Philosophy of Pessimism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982) and Hannu Salmi, *Imagined Germany: Richard Wagner's National Utopia* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999).

² I provide merely a select list of fairly recent examples: Udo Bermbach, *'Blühendes Leid'. Politik und Gesellschaft in Wagners Musikdramen* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2003); Udo Bermbach, *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks: Richard Wagners politisch-ästhetische Utopie*, second edition (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2004); Hansjörg Jungheinrich, *Richard Wagners*

philosophy in its broadest context, integrating this German-language discourse into his book would have helped to untangle the complex network of Wagner's theories. Even though the first part of Young's book contains a commendably succinct exposition of Wagner's early socialist viewpoint, Young does not spend much time on the textual sources of Wagner's notions beyond the "usual suspects" (Hegel, Feuerbach, Proudhon, Bakunin, etc.). In light of the philosophical orientation of Young's study, the scope of which does not permit detailed historical research, this seems to be a minor drawback.

Another missed opportunity carries more weight: the fourth chapter of Young's analysis (pp. 43–61) poses several intriguing 'exploratory questions' concerning Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, scrutinizing his initial aesthetic theory from a modern point of view. A similar approach to other central components of Wagner's philosophy, resulting in a more critical examination of their historical implications and actual results, would be welcome here. To give an obvious example: on another occasion, Young treats Wagner's 'romantic critique of the Enlightenment', aimed against the all-encompassing rationalization of human existence, in some detail (pp. 19–20). It would have been interesting to discuss the effects of Wagner's Romantic attitude – directly expressed by the "narcotic" effect of his music, as Hanslick, Nietzsche and Adorno came to view it – in light of later philosophical movements and historic events. This also applies to Wagner's historically momentous distinction between (French) 'civilization' and (German) 'culture', which derives from the same line of thought and has had important historical implications. Again, this becomes particularly apparent in relation to Young's critical analysis of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which clearly shows how a philosophical investigation of Wagner's writings can enrich an older, predominantly historical approach to his philosophical writings.

As stated above, the first part of Young's study surveys the scope of Wagner's ideas in great detail. A problem arises, however, in the reasons Young provides for his choice of topics. Certainly, a single survey of Wagner's philosophy cannot cover every aspect of his extensive literary *oeuvre*. However, a major issue like Wagner's anti-Semitism – a prominent if not integral element of his criticism of modern culture – cannot simply be excluded by stipulating that this issue belongs to Wagner's personality, not his philosophy (p. 57). Even if one is willing to grant a clear-cut separation between philosophy and personality – a problematic distinction in itself – then such decisive categorization would surely apply to other topics treated by Young. Wagner's critique of capitalism, for example, is certainly infused with Wagner's personal experiences, his lifelong desire to live like a rich *Bürger* without ever having the financial means to do so. Furthermore, Wagner's teleological construction of the history of art and its downfall from ancient Greek tragedy to modern times, presenting the 'artwork of the future' – in the end, his own musical dramas – as the only way out of artistic decline, must be at least partially regarded as expressing personal attitudes. Naturally, Wagner's critique of capitalism and art should never be *reduced* to purely subjective motivations, but his specific personality *influenced* his social stances and aesthetic outlook every bit as much as his cultural critique, which was profoundly informed by Wagner's anti-Semitic worldview.

Weltschau. Verhängnis oder Verheißung? (Berlin: Frieling, 1999); Ulrike Kienzle, '... daß wissend würde die Welt!' Religion und Philosophie in Richard Wagners Musikdramen (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005); Wolfgang Schild, Staat und Recht im Denken Richard Wagners (Stuttgart: Boorberg, 1994).

The second part of Young's analysis is concerned with Wagner's conversion from 'Hegelian optimism to Schopenhauerian pessimism' (p. xvi) due to his impactful discovery of *The World as Will and Idea* (1819) in October 1854. In itself, the thesis that 'the discovery of Schopenhauer ... constituted a fundamental reversal in Wagner's philosophy' (p. 126) is not particularly innovative. On the contrary, it would be extremely challenging to find any study on Wagner's works, thought or writings that does not discuss Schopenhauer's influence to some extent. The new aspect provided by Young is his thesis about the high degree to which Schopenhauer influenced Wagner's thinking in the later stages of his life. Young argues that Wagner's musical dramas after 1854 are decisively shaped by Schopenhauer's philosophical framework, encompassing his philosophy of "pure" music as well as his thorough pessimism and his general ethical system. However, as Young quickly reminds us, Wagner's adoption of Schopenhauer's philosophy cannot be regarded as a mere copy: 'while the broad parameters of Wagner's philosophical writings after 1854 are determined by his new mentor, those writings are by no means slavish repetitions of his master's voice' (p. 88). Wagner's creative handling of Schopenhauer's reflections is made clear by Young's study of Wagner's essay *Beethoven* (1870; pp. 103–7) that develops Schopenhauer's philosophy of musical beauty beyond its initial limits and thoroughly transforms it into a philosophy of the musically sublime, capable of uniting the 'redemptive and dramatic' aspects of music itself (p. 103).

Young rightly insists that Schopenhauer's philosophy did not just lead to a sudden change in Wagner's aesthetics by regarding "pure" music as the highest art-form – an idea that stands in evident contrast to Wagner's earlier opinions on the essentially dramatic nature of art. Instead, Wagner's unreserved acceptance of Schopenhauer's *philosophical pessimism* led to his complete re-evaluation of "pure" music. Since Wagner adopts the pessimistic viewpoint of his new "mentor" by embracing the 'error of all existence' (p. 90), art does not have to fulfil a social function anymore, it does not have to improve worldly life that is doomed to suffering and boredom from the very start. By utterly altering music's purpose from a 'this-worldly' social artwork to an 'other-worldly' redemptive phenomenon, the semantic deficiency of "pure" music loses its devaluing implications. Thus, Wagner's former hierarchy of text, music and drama is completely inverted, placing the 'redemptive' qualities of "pure" music above any semantic meaning that applies to 'relations of a social [and] political nature' (pp. 107–8). By carefully examining Wagner's implicit critique of Schopenhauer's philosophy of musical beauty and Wagner's original theory of the musically sublime, Young calls attention to Wagner's productive reception of Schopenhauer's philosophy as a whole. However, Young's critical analysis of Wagner's turn is largely limited to this specific subject, thereby suggesting that Wagner's conversion in regard to other issues was a more or less seamless adoption of Schopenhauer's worldview.

Young astutely notices Wagner's distortion of his own past, considering his retrospective testimonial that "'intuitively", as both man and artist he had *always* been a pessimist' and that his 'revolutionary optimism' had been a 'remarkable alienation from self' to be a 'unifying life-narrative' (p. 108). However, as an instructive analysis by Günter Zöller convincingly demonstrates,³ Wagner's

³ Günter Zöller, 'Schopenhauer' in *Wagner und Nietzsche. Kultur – Werk – Wirkung. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Stefan Sorgner, James Birx and Nikolaus Knoepffler (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2008): 355–72.

comment in a letter to Franz Liszt stating that Schopenhauer's pessimistic viewpoint 'was of course not new to me' (p. 91), runs much deeper than even Young is willing to concede. In this context, Zöller quotes an important historical document: Wagner's letters to the poet, composer and political activist August Röckel. In January 1854, nine months before his friend Georg Herwegh made him aware of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Wagner articulated crucial components of his pessimistic worldview. For example, Wagner anticipated the Tristanesque notion that only the loving merging of the "I" and "You", the total abolition of the divisive "and", can overcome egoism and reveal the world in full reality. Wagner also explains the reasons for Wotan's intentional sacrifice in the third act of *Siegfried*, his 'life goal of renunciation and resignation as path to salvation and redemption' and his 'intentional affirmation of his own doom'.⁴

Even though Young correctly distinguishes a Feuerbachian conception from a Tristanesque conception of love – love that transcends individuality in the 'here and now' and love that transcends individuality to 'something behind the "dream" of nature' (p. 118) – Wagner's insistence on love as a means of complete redemption is still markedly opposed to Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation. Schopenhauerian redemption is a metaphysical *awareness* of the ultimate identity of all things – *tat tvam asi* or 'this art thou' – brought about by philosophical contemplation, not any kind of love that is strictly bound to at least two distinct entities. As soon as you *know* all worldly things to be one, as soon as you have broken the *principium individuationis* and thus have reached the "saintly" viewpoint of complete identity with every other object, love becomes self-love. Even Parsifal, Wagner's character most attuned to Schopenhauer's philosophy, is not enlightened by sudden sympathy toward Amfortas's anguish, but by Kundry's *kiss*, his own sexual awakening. Thus, *pace* Schopenhauer, love still forms an integral element of the redemptive process according to Wagner's concept (pp. 116–17). In my opinion, Zöller's reading of Wagner's transition following his momentous acquaintance with *The World as Will and Idea* as a 'left Hegelian reframing of Schopenhauer' is still the most accurate description of Schopenhauer's – doubtlessly enormous – influence on Wagner's later works.⁵ If the former undervaluation of Schopenhauer's importance for Wagner's mature period is considered to be left of the spectrum of the history of ideas, Young's analysis swings the pendulum too far to the right. After Young's meticulous elucidation of Wagner's turn from 'Hegelian optimism to Schopenhauerian pessimism', a more critical account of his *implicit critique* and *creative reception* of Schopenhauer's philosophy seems in order to fully capture this complex philosophical relationship.⁶

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⁴ Zöller, 'Schopenhauer', 361.

⁵ Zöller, 'Schopenhauer', 362.

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