

## *Wagner, Nietzsche, and the Polemics of Opera*

### **The Roots of Undying Hatred**

Jacques Offenbach's posthumous opera *Les contes d'Hoffmann* had its gala Viennese premiere on 7 December 1881, at the Komische Oper, elegantly refurbished and renamed the Ringtheater. The next day a sold-out house expectantly waited for the curtain to rise on what promised to be the hit of the season. Before it did, the curtain caught fire and the audience panicked. A series of gas explosions left the house in darkness and the doors could not be opened. Early reports estimated the dead at nine hundred; eventually, the number was determined to be three hundred and eighty-four, chiefly from the upper galleries where the cheaper seats were located.<sup>1</sup>

When Cosima Wagner read the news to her illustrious husband over the breakfast table, his response was unruffled: "When people are buried in coal-mines, I feel indignation at a community that obtains its heating by such means, but when such-and-such a number of members of this community die while watching an Offenbach operetta, an activity that contains no trace of moral superiority, it leaves me quite indifferent."<sup>2</sup> The casual cruelty of the remark would be stupefying, were it not seen as the culmination of two decades of his resentment of the French composer.

Throughout Cosima's diaries for the years leading up to the Ringtheater conflagration, Offenbach recurs as a sporadic irritant, like a seasonal rash. In 1870, during the Prussian invasion of France, Wagner expresses disappointment that the German public cannot free itself from Verdi and

<sup>1</sup> Elmar Buck, *Thalia in Flammen. Theaterbrände in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Erlensee and Cologne: EFB, 2000), 165–83.

<sup>2</sup> Cosima Wagner, 16 Dec. 1881, *Die Tagebücher*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mark, 2 vols. (Munich and Zurich: Piper, 1976–1977), II, 770. Note also his later "joke" to Cosima that "all Jews should be burned at a performance of *Nathan [the Wise]*." *Tagebücher*, II, 852.

Offenbach; the next year, he assumes that the students in Zurich failed to invite him to a peace celebration owing to his status as a mere opera composer “perhaps a shade ahead of Offenbach.” A walk in a Dresden park in 1873 is spoiled because the military band is playing Offenbach, who is deplored the following year as one of “today’s monarchs.” In 1875 Wagner becomes very cross when a costumier conveys Princess Hohenlohe’s message “inquiring whether Venus’s costume” in *Tannhäuser* “should be *à la Offenbach*” (i.e., sexily revealing) and in 1879 he undergoes a sleepless night in Bayreuth because the clucking in the poultry yard reminds him of the laughing chorus in *Orphée aux enfers*, heard in Mainz twenty years earlier. His pleasure, in 1880, in reading the African travels of the German diamond-hunter Ernst von Weber is marred by the frequent mention of Offenbach quadrilles. Only the fellow composer’s death the following year gives him some surcease.

The animosity to Offenbach and the French culture he represented was slow in coming. When the young Wagner served his apprenticeship in Würzburg, Magdeburg, and Riga between 1833 and 1839, he delighted in the comic operas of Boieldieu and Auber, taking a “childlike pleasure” in “the craft and insolence of their orchestral effects.”<sup>3</sup> He long regarded Paris as “the well-spring” of opera: “Other cities are only ‘*étapes*’ [stepping-stones]. Paris is the heart of modern civilization.”<sup>4</sup> When he returned there in September 1859, leading the most exiguous existence while he promoted the premiere of *Tannhäuser*, he found that Offenbach was the rage of the city. According to their mutual Paris acquaintance Charles Nuitter, French translator of *Tannhäuser*, Wagner, “on the advice of my good friends,” worked on operettas that were never accepted. Indeed, he would have liked the income obtained from waltzes and comic operas, and, for that matter, the popularity as a conductor that Offenbach enjoyed.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, *Orphée aux enfers* attained its 228th consecutive performance. At the behest of Napoleon III, a celebratory gala was planned at the Théâtre des Italiens, its centerpiece a musical satire. *Le carnaval des revues*, which opened on 10 February 1860, featured “The Symphony of the Future,” a farce with words by Eugène Grangé and Philippe Gille and

<sup>3</sup> “Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde (1851),” in *Richard Wagners Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Julius Kapp [henceforth *RWGS*]. 14 vols. (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1914), I, 101. English translation, “A communication to my friends” in *Richard Wagner’s prose works* [henceforth *RWPW*], I.

<sup>4</sup> Wagner, letter to Ludwig II, July 1867, quoted in Jean-Claude Yon, *Jacques Offenbach* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 21.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, at this time Offenbach had just suffered the failure of the first version of *Geneviève de Brabant* and his theatre, the Bouffes-Parisiens, was in financial difficulties.

music by Offenbach. After a prologue, the stage discloses Grétry, Mozart, Gluck, and Weber playing dominos in Elysium, awaiting the royalties from their frequent revivals. To while away the time, they interview representatives of new music, including Meyerbeer and the unnamed “composer of the future” (played by the comic actor Hippolyte Bonnet). He promotes a “strange, unheard-of, indefinable, indescribable” music and conducts a deafening “Wedding March,” which parodies the bridal chorus in *Lohengrin* (interwoven with a banal tune “Les bottes de Bastien”). Its motifs simulate the weeping of the bride and her mother, the wedding banquet, and a donnybrook; Bonnet then sings a “Tyrolienne de l’avenir” (“The Yodel of the Future”), including a sneeze, before the four classical composers kick him offstage.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly before *Le carnaval* opened, Offenbach had been naturalized, so that it was his first produced work as a French citizen. Wagner consequently saw him as a renegade who had sold his birthright for a mess of *potage*. For his part, Offenbach, despite his working relationship with the translator Alfred von Wolzogen, an opponent of Music of the Future, had no particular animus against Wagner. Nor were the French literati hostile to Germans during this period; they popularly characterized them as phlegmatic beer-drinkers and dreamy metaphysicians. Revues typically parodied current fads and fashions. This sort of teasing was common in Parisian artistic circles. Offenbach, as a foreigner and a Jew, had had to acclimatize himself to it early. His own spirit of mischief, perhaps steeped in Rhineland traditions of Roman holiday and *commedia dell’arte*, reveled in it. Meyerbeer never took offense at Offenbach’s frequent pokes at “grand opera.”<sup>7</sup> Wagner, less secure in his career, was thin-skinned, however. The three concerts he had managed to conduct in Paris had been attacked in print by Berlioz just prior to *Le carnaval*, which made its ridicule all the more stinging. The debacle of *Tannhäuser* at the Paris Opéra on 13

<sup>6</sup> Yon, *Offenbach*, 227–29; Maria Haffner, “Offenbach und Wagner,” *Der Auftakt* 10 (1930/31): 203; Antoine Golea, “Il fallait vivre ...,” in *Le siècle d’Offenbach*. Cahiers Barrault-Renaud 24, 94. The revue ran for forty-six performances and the “Tyrolienne de l’avenir” was issued as separate sheet music, with a caricature of Bonnet as Wagner on the cover. See Jean-Claude Yon and Laurent Fraison, with Dominique Ghesquière, *Offenbach*. Les Dossiers du Musée d’Orsay 58 (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1996), 101. It is recorded on *Anna Sofie von Otter Sings Offenbach* (DGG 289 471 501-2).

<sup>7</sup> Offenbach always remained on good terms with Meyerbeer and in 1864 wrote an obituary, in which he stated “He never spoke ill of anyone, discerning and admiring beautiful things wherever he found them, profoundly despising exclusive systems ...” – another dig at Wagner. Haffner, “Offenbach und Wagner,” 205.



2.1. Bonnet as Wagner, appalling classical composers, in *La symphonie de l'avenir*. Caricature by Stop at the head of the sheet music, 1860.

March 1861 (with Offenbach, Berlioz, and Gounod in the audience),<sup>8</sup> and the ensuing bad reviews, mockery in the press, and a deficit that threatened debtor's prison, convinced Wagner that Offenbach was his enemy, first, because he actively propagandized against him, and then, because Offenbach's own success spoiled the taste of the age for Wagnerian music. The French, he would decide, preferred dance tunes to harmonics, virtuosity to true worth.

As a result, Wagner temporarily channeled his ambition to be a pan-European genius to the narrower goal of writing music to express the German spirit. He allied himself more closely with the chauvinistic ideals

<sup>8</sup> To add insult to injury, Offenbach's ballet *Le papillon* was warmly received on the same stage both before and after the *Tannhäuser* fiasco. Wagner's famous account of the debacle is "Bericht über die Aufführung des 'Tannhäuser' in Paris (1861)," in *RWGS*, II, 110–21; English translation, *RWPW*, III, 351–58. Also see Oscar Comettant and Paul Scudo, "Debate at the Paris Opéra: *Tannhäuser* and the French critics 1861," in *Richard Wagner and his world*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 347–71.

of the aging *Vormärz* movement which held both the French and the Jews in contempt and promoted a nebulous Germanic freedom. At the very time when its sympathizers were campaigning for a purified Teutonic culture to be secured by national unity, Offenbach's operas were packing German theatres. This raised the hackles of the radical patriots even as it scandalized the artistic conservatives. The eminent tragic actor Eduard Devrient read the libretto of *La chanson de Fortunio* and parsed its moral as follows: "I'm wanton [*liederlich*], you're wanton, he was wanton, we will be wanton." "What a situation for taste nowadays!"<sup>9</sup>

### Across the Rhine

In view of later political events, it is ironic that Berlin, capital of Prussia, still a small garrison town of half a million inhabitants, offered Offenbach his first German successes. After his one-acts had appeared at the Kroll Theater, F. W. Deichmann, manager of the Friedrich-Wilhelm Theater, sensing a winner, offered him a contract even for the operas he had not yet written. Between 1860 and 1872, fourteen of his works appeared there in German translation, the innuendo pointedly projected across the footlights by sultry Marie Geistinger.<sup>10</sup> During this run of Offenbachian hits, Wagner, after fifteen years of non-performance, enjoyed only two premieres (*Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger*), both in the Bavarian capital of Munich. Munich, conservative and Catholic, had inveighed against Offenbach. When *La belle Hélène* and *Barbe-bleue* appeared there, the newspapers waxed indignant. The Volkstheater production of the former was condemned as

The most hideous monster of our time, made 99 per cent of muck and one percent of wit ... A play which endeavors to stimulate the grossest sensuality ... which finds its audience only thanks to the smuttiness and indecency of its contents ... It is a curse laid upon the French literature of adultery,

<sup>9</sup> Eduard Devrient, 6 Aug. 1861, *Aus seinen Tagebüchern. Karlsruhe 1852–1870*, ed. Rolf Kabel (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1964), 384. Wagner himself considered Devrient untalented: *RWGS*, XII, 147–50; XIII, 86–98.

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Jochen Irmer, "Jacques Offenbachs Werke in Wien und Berlin. Zum 150. Geburtstag des Komponisten am 20. Juni 1969," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, 18, 1 (1969): 127–28; Otto Schneider, *Berlin wie es weint und lacht. Spaziergänge durch Berlins Operettengeschichte* (Berlin (East): VEB Lied der Zeit, 1968), 36–38; Gerhard Wahnrau, *Berlin. Stadt der Theater*, 415. The German title of *La belle Hélène* – *Die schöne Helene* – was so familiar that the cartoonist Wilhelm Busch could be sure his readers would catch the allusion in his graphic verse-novel *Die fromme Helene* (1872). In the "what goes around comes around" cycle, Busch's work was made into a comic opera by Dagny Gioulami and Edward Rushton (State Opera of Hanover, 2007).

that it must perforce produce a *Belle Hélène*, in which adultery is depicted *ad oculos* on stage.<sup>11</sup>

A police report explained that “owing to the primitive and brutal sensuality of the Munich public, the indecent innuendo produces a greater and more dangerous impression that it would among blasé people, such as the Parisians and the Viennese.”<sup>12</sup>

In Vienna, a more sophisticated center of German-speaking art, Offenbach's pieces were all but naturalized, thanks to the brilliant adaptations of Johann Nestroy and the saucy renditions of Josefine Gallmeyer.<sup>13</sup> For Wagner, however, the Austrian capital, where his music-dramas were reputed to be unplayable, was beneath contempt: home of his harshest critic, Eduard Hanslick, it so swarmed with Jews that Wagner dubbed the city “half Asian.” In an essay of 1863 he rebuked the Wiener Hofoper for wasting cultured German musicians on vapid operas. The following year Matteo Salvi, the Hofoper's manager, postponed the Austrian premiere of *Tristan und Isolde* to bring forward that of Offenbach's new German fairy opera *Die Rheinnixen*. Wagner was infuriated, not only because of the delay, but because he had a draft of his own treatment of Rhine maidens in his desk drawer.<sup>14</sup> Nothing in Offenbach's piece takes place under water, but there is a last-act flooding of the Rhine engineered by elves and naiads to distract the pursuing soldiery from the fugitive lovers. A finale in which the Rhine overflows its banks? Did Wagner feel pre-empted or was he influenced despite himself? In the face of these affronts, like Dickens's Mr Podsnap, he dismissed the Austro-Hungarian capital with a wave of his arm, and wrote to his eight-year-old son, in a regally Victorian tone, “*Wir sind gar nicht zufrieden mit Wien, and gedenken sehr bald abzureisen* [We are in no way pleased with Vienna and intend to leave it very soon].”<sup>15</sup>

For Wagner, the new German spirit, permeated as it was by Prussian militarism, was to be “Spartan,” a culture of stalwart ephebes and sagacious elders, chaste, idealistic, and Apollonian. As Joachim Köhler has

<sup>11</sup> *Neueste Nachrichten* (Munich, 4 Sep. 1867), quoted in M. Jahrmärker, “Vom Sittenverderber zum ewig klassischen Komponisten: Offenbach-Rezeption und theatergeschichtliche Entwicklungen in München der 1860er bis 1880er Jahre,” in *Offenbach und die Schauplätze seines Musiktheaters*. Thurnauer Schriften zum Musiktheater 17. Ed Rainer Franke (Laaber: Laaber, 1999), 278.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>13</sup> Blanka Glossy and Gisela Berger, *Josefine Gallmeyer. Wiens größte Volksschauspielerin* (Vienna: Waldheim-Eberle, n.d.), 62–66 *et seq.*

<sup>14</sup> “Bericht an den deutschen Wagner-Verein,” in *RWGW*, II, 241. Marcel Prawy, *Die Wiener Oper, Geschichte und Geschichten* (Vienna, Munich, and Zurich: Fritz Molden, 1969), 35.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in “An English Officer” [pseudonym of George Greville Moore], *Society recollections in Paris and Vienna 1879–1904* (New York: D. Appleton, 1908), 255.

pointed out, this rose-colored, rather pederastic vision has a long tradition in Germany, stretching from Winckelmann to Platen; in the 1860s, many besides Wagner and Nietzsche subscribed to it. “Whereas the love between man and woman is by its nature self-centered and hedonistic,” Wagner wrote, “that between men represents an affection of a far higher order.”<sup>16</sup> The epitome of heterosexual sensuality, animalistic, licentious, and materialistic, was the Jew, the antithesis to the New Man.

### Jews in Music

In his essay of 1865, “What Is German?,” Wagner attributed the decline of German culture to the Jews and sought salvation in the values of the “characteristic German psyche.”<sup>17</sup> In line with his political stance, he reissued his obscure 1850 pamphlet “Jewishness in music” in an expanded form in 1869, the year that *Die Meistersinger* and Offenbach’s *Les brigands* both had their premieres. Whereas the earlier version had attacked chiefly the “serious musicians” Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn, the new recension put forth Offenbach and the popularity of his frivolous operas as prime example. Even his well-known mispronunciation of French is implied. The Jews may well master the language of a country in which they

lived from one generation to another, but they will always speak it like a foreigner, like a language they have acquired, not been born with ... The Jews are capable only of confused and empty imitation ... never of true poetic language or true works of art.<sup>18</sup>

Offenbach had already suffered a few anti-Semitic slurs in his adopted country. The music critic Paul Scudo, an equal-opportunity castigator, mounted attacks on Berlioz, Wagner, Verdi, Liszt, and Gounod; but in dismissing Offenbach he invoked the “fatal brand” of the Semitic race which debarred the composer from beauty and feeling. However, the many French caricatures, without sparing Offenbach’s nutcracker profile and lanky physique, invariably show him triumphant, crowned, bemedaled,

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Joachim Köhler, *Nietzsche and Wagner: a lesson in subjugation*, trans. Ronald Taylor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 84–87.

<sup>17</sup> Köhler, *Nietzsche and Wagner*, 106.

<sup>18</sup> “Das Judenthum in der Musik,” in *RWGW*, XIII, 7–29; in English in *RWPW*, III, 79–122; it was supplemented by a letter to Marie Muchanoff, “Aufklärungen über das Judenthum in der Musik,” in *RWGW*, XIII, 29–51. Nietzsche parroted this belief in his projected but unsent letter to David Friedrich Strauss, author of a controversial life of Jesus: “Someone has told me that you are a Jew, and as such have an imperfect command of the German language.” Quoted in Köhler, *Nietzsche and Wagner*, 95.



Der semitisch-musikalisch-akrobatische Gorilla (Simia Affenbach), welcher auf dem Vorhang des Friedrich-Wilhelms-Theaters das Publicum lange angrinste, war seiner Zeit die Freude aller Operettenhierzgärten, in denen er durch seine oft sehr drolligen Töne alle musikalischen Kinder ergötzte. Er ging zwar auf allen musikalischen Bieren, hatte aber doch auch, wenn man ihn bei der Patrone von „Fortunio's Lied“ betrachtete, musikmenschliche Momente. Obgleich in Paris geboren, ist er doch in Paris gezüchtet, wofürst ihn die „schönen Helenen, Genovesen und Weiber von Georgien an seinem „Blaubart“ fräbbeln. Gegenwärtig ist er, da sich die Welt inzwischen viele andere Affen gekauft hat, etwas außer Mode gekommen.

2.2. “The semitical-musical-acrobatical gorilla (Simia Affenbach),” Leipzig *Puck* (1876).

applauded by disembodied hands (“l’opinion publique enthousiasmé”). German caricatures emphasize his “Semitic features” and make no reference to his talent. A typical cartoon in the Leipzig *Puck* (1876) shows him as “Der semitisch-musikalisch-akrobatische Gorilla (Simia Affenbach?)” [a pun on the German “*Affe*,” ape], grinning through the bars of the Friedrich-Wilhelm Theater.<sup>19</sup>

The envy of Offenbach that fueled Wagner’s Judophobia in his notorious essay is even more to the fore in a *Posse* or farce he wrote in November 1870 while victory in the Franco-Prussian War was still being contested.<sup>20</sup> The first draft was entitled *The Capitulation. A Comedy by Aristo. Phanes*: in it the Prussians surrender to Offenbach, the “international negotiator.” Wagner tried to persuade his protégé Hans Richter to write music for it in the style of Offenbach, insisting that this “uncommonly appealing” skit “belongs to the real folk theatre.” Wagner’s stooping from high culture to popular burlesque implies a desire to vie with Offenbach on his own terms, in Thomas Grey’s words, “‘consuming’ him, cannibalizing an alien musical-theatrical genre in a gesture of covert cultural imperialism.”<sup>21</sup> After

<sup>19</sup> Paul Scudo, “Revue musicale,” *La Revue des Deux Mondes* (15 Dec. 1860): 1029. Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1921), 166, 268.

<sup>20</sup> See Thomas S. Grey, “*Eine Kapitulation*: Aristophanic operetta as cultural warfare,” in *Richard Wagner and his world*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 87–122.

<sup>21</sup> Grey, “*Eine Kapitulation*,” 97. Grey points out how some of the devices in Wagner’s lyrics are ponderous attempts to imitate similar effects in Offenbachian operetta.



sketching a handful of numbers, Richter declined to follow through.<sup>22</sup> When the singer Hans Betz begged off submitting it to a suburban Berlin theatre (too expensive to produce, he claimed), Wagner retitled it *A Capitulation. A Comedy in the Manner of Antiquity*. Once the French had surrendered at Sedan in January 1871 and Ludwig II of Bavaria asked the King of Prussia to accept the imperial crown, Wagner laid the playlet aside, but included it in his collected works two years later. His preface justified this as an attempt to reform German popular taste away from French models.

Although the preface characterizes the skit as “harmless and jolly,” Wagner’s attribution of it to a dead Greek and then to “E. Schlossenbach,” along with his own reluctance to write its music, indicates a tacit awareness that it may go too far. Set during the Siege of Paris, it caricatures the leading French statesmen, along with Victor Hugo, who emerges from the prompter’s box and brags that he has navigated the sewers *à la* Jean Valjean to secure provisions. France is to be saved by finding suitable ballerinas for a newly opened Opéra. While Gambetta flies off in a balloon in search of them, the National Guard repels an infestation of rats that turns into a corps de ballet (a pun on *rat de l’opéra*, slang for a ballet girl – Wagner may have been avenging the Parisian imperative that he provide a ballet for *Tannhäuser*). An invasion of German impresarios needs to be repelled, so Offenbach is invited to lead a quadrille. The prologue declares, sarcastically, “everything requires true genius and a natural gift, both of which we gladly conceded to Herr Offenbach in his departure.” In the play’s finale, he is introduced, cornet in hand, as “the most international individual in the world, who ensures us the intervention of all Europe! Whoever has him within his walls goes eternally undefeated and has the whole world for a friend! – Do you know him, the miracle man, Orpheus emerged from the Underworld, the venerated pied piper of Hamelin?” (The reference to Offenbach’s “internationalism” foreshadows the anti-Semitic charge of “rootless cosmopolitanism” during the Dreyfus affair, in Nazi propaganda, and in Stalin’s “doctors’ plot.”) The chorus then intones,

Kra-k! kra-k! kra-kerakra-k!  
Behold Jack von Offenback!  
Let the cannon fire be disrupted,  
So the tunes won’t be interrupted! ...  
Oh! how pleasant, oh! how sweet,

<sup>22</sup> Wagner, letter to Hans Richter, 28 Nov. 1870. *Selected letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stephen Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 777–78.

And downright easy on the feet!  
 Krak! krak! krakerack!  
 O splendid Jack von Offenbach.<sup>23</sup>

This lampoon glanced off its target and boomeranged, severely harming Wagner in French musical circles for some years. So did his reminiscences of Auber, written at this time, in which the French composer was ironically praised for “the pseudo-classical polish through whose glamour none but the sympathetic Parisian initiate can penetrate to the substratum that alone interests him in the long run,” i.e., obscenity. It was for Auber’s heir Offenbach to glorify “the warmth of the dunghill wherein wallow all the swine in Europe.”<sup>24</sup> “Filth” (*Schmutz*) became Wagner’s shorthand for Offenbach. Just as the expanded essay “Jewishness in music” of 1869 had shocked Hans von Bülow, Franz Liszt, and music-lovers in Paris and Vienna, so now devoted French Wagnerians washed their hands of their idol. An organized demonstration followed an 1876 performance of the music from *Götterdämmerung* in one of Jules Pasdeloup’s *Concerts populaires* and Pasdeloup swore off Wagner for a couple of years.

### The Matter of Internationalism

Offenbach’s alleged “internationalism” did him no good either. For the duration of the war there had been a boycott of his music in the major cities of Germany, where rumors ran that he was maligning his homeland. In August 1870, he had to write to the Berlin publisher Albert Hofmann “It is a lie that I wrote a song against Germany ... I would take it as an infamy to write a mere note against my first fatherland, the land where I was born, the land where I have so many close relatives and very good friends.”<sup>25</sup>

Yet in Paris, he was considered a turncoat. Four years before the Franco-Prussian war, his immensely popular *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* had been co-opted by Bismarck in his campaign to unite Germany under Prussia. After the victory over the Austrians at Sadová, when the Prussians

<sup>23</sup> Wagner, *Eine Kapitulation*, in *RWGW*, VI, 285ff. “Jack,” pronounced German-style, is reminiscent of “Jock” or “Jocko,” the Brazilian ape of popular pantomime, another celebrated *Affe*. A French translation of Wagner’s skit appeared in 1875 and an English translation by William Acton Ellis in *RWPW*, V, 3–33. See Hervé Lacombe, *Les voies de l’opéra français au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 364, n. 47; Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, *Wagner and Nietzsche*, trans. Joachim Neugroschl (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 54; and Steven Huebner, *French opera at the fin de siècle. Wagnerism, nationalism and style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>24</sup> “Erinnerungen an Auber” (1871), in *RWGW*, VIII, 139; in English, *RWPW*, V, 51.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Schneidereit, *Berlin wie es weint und lacht*, 39–40.

were annexing or mediatizing petty German states, the jubilant Iron Chancellor had crowed (from Paris, no less) “We are getting rid of the G erolsteins, there will soon be none left. I am indebted to your Parisian artistes for showing the world how ridiculous they were.”<sup>26</sup> This sardonic acknowledgement that *La Grande-Duchesse* had abetted the establishment of the new German Empire appalled Offenbach. A letter of March 1871 protests “I hope that this Wilhelm Krupp and his dreadful Bismarck will pay for it all. Ah! – awful people, these Prussians! ... I will never visit that damned country again.”<sup>27</sup> The Prussians returned the compliment. The Friedrich-Wilhelm Theater, for over a decade the home of Offenbach’s operas in Berlin, produced nothing from his hand in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>28</sup> When a hit Viennese production of *La belle H el ne* visited the German capital in 1875, the *Preu sische Zeitung* condemned it as “this Jewish speculation on the spirit of modern society [which] caricatures whatever is regarded as sublime and sacred in family life.”<sup>29</sup> As the Prussian actor Friedrich Haase put it, in the postwar period a Chinese Wall of mutual hostility was erected between French and German culture.<sup>30</sup>

The polarity that Wagner attempted to establish between himself and Offenbach – the principled standard-bearer of a modern, purified ideal of *Tonkunst* versus the cynical, opportunistic purveyor of meretricious melodies – did not convince the best-informed onlookers. To begin with, there was the striking discrepancy between the nature of their compositions and their domestic arrangements. Eduard Hanslick, who visited Offenbach in 1868, was impressed that his household was staid and middle-class, and the man himself quiet and industrious.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Karl Marx, who had shared Wagner’s political ideas in his youth, now wrote to his daughter that the private life of “this New-German-Prussian Imperial musician” seemed apt for comic-opera treatment.

<sup>26</sup> Ernest Alfred Vizetelly, *Paris and her people under the Third Republic* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1919), 35–36.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Schneidereit, *loc. cit.* During his American tour of 1876, Offenbach was shocked by the triumphalist war paintings in the German pavilion at the Universal Exposition and bemused that Wagner had been paid \$5,000 for the “grand march” that opened the exposition.

<sup>28</sup> Wahnrau, *Berlin. Stadt der Theater*, 416–17. The Viktoria-Theater, which opened in September 1871, tried to pick up the slack with Offenbach’s later operas, but had no success, despite strong casts.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Kurt G anzl, *The encyclopedia of the musical theatre* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), I, 101.

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Haase, *Was ich erlebte 1846–1896* (Berlin: R. Bong, 1896), 124.

<sup>31</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein f ur Deutsche Literatur, 1894), II, 81–83.

He together with a wife (who had separated from von Bülow), with the cuckold von Bülow, with their common father-in-law Liszt keep house all four together in Bayreuth, hug, kiss and adore each other and let them enjoy each other. Keep in mind as well that Liszt is a Catholic monk and Madame Wagner (Cosima her Christian name) is his “natural” daughter acquired from Madame d’Agoult (Daniel Stern) – one can hardly come up with a better opera libretto for Offenbach than the family group with their patriarchal relations.<sup>32</sup>

Some conservatives preferred to call down “a plague on both your houses.” An anonymous pamphlet that appeared in 1871, *Richard Wagner und Jacob Offenbach. Ein Wort im Harnisch [A Word in Wrath]*, declared that when it comes to harmonic principles they are alike as two eggs. Wagner’s “hatred for musical Jewry is an idle affectation,” an aping of Schumann’s hostility to Mendelssohn; in fact Wagner and Offenbach are “true co-religionists” in their disregard for and mockery of harmony and the rules of taste. If anything, Offenbach goes farther than Wagner in innovative instrumentation, using the bass viol, oboe, and cello to introduce a diabolical element; his are operas for the demi-monde, churning up the scum and filth from the cloacae of Parisian life. The music is composed to express immorality and sensuality. So far the anonymous author echoes Wagner’s diatribes. But if the German public is so debased that it welcomes such vulgarity, it cannot turn to Wagner for a remedy. He is his own Beckmesser, his “unending melodies” bogged down in the elementary lessons of composition manuals.

But in the glorious splendor of a newly risen German empire we want a pure and rational conception at least to prepare a music of the future and opera of the future other than this gross self-over-estimation and the obsolete, unsavoury deviations of the ponderous Wagnerian music of the future!<sup>33</sup>

If Wagner was aware of this attack (and Cosima did assiduously track bad reviews), it must have galled him to be yoked with his *bête noire* and classified as the greater of the two evils. The anonymous pamphleteer had seen beyond superficial differences to a more elemental similarity: both composers undermined the musical establishment by their innovations.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Grete Wehmeyer, *Höllengalopp und Götterdämmerung. Lachkultur bei Jacques Offenbach und Richard Wagner* (Cologne: Dittrich, 1997), 114.

<sup>33</sup> *Wagner und Offenbach*, 47. Hans von Bülow also considered Offenbach to be an “involuntary collaborator of Richard Wagner” in the dismantling of Meyerbeer’s operatic edifice. Haffner, “Offenbach und Wagner,” 205.

Had he known of the characterization of Offenbach as a “minor Mozart,” Wagner might have balked at being cast as the little Salieri.

In the face of all this abuse, how had Offenbach responded? He was not a polemicist by nature and, although the occasional private remark has been recorded as hearsay – “Wagner is Berlioz, minus the melody”<sup>34</sup> – he saved his aggression for rehearsals and litigation over copyright. His ripostes tend to be imbedded in his comedy. As Max Nordau pointed out, Offenbach can be credited with introducing “polemics into the field of music. He is the creator of satirical music ... in a struggle against authority and tradition.”<sup>35</sup> When he was working on *La belle Hélène* in 1864, he intended to incorporate a parody of the song-contest from *Tannhäuser* in the second act, but his librettists talked him out of it, replacing it with a game of snakes-and-ladders.<sup>36</sup>

### A Pin to Puncture a Balloon

A subtler form of satire is imbedded in Offenbach’s treatment of mythology. The Venusberg setting of Wagner’s first act is meant to display a kind of love that would be later contrasted, to its discredit, with a more spiritual love; the text of 1844/45 refers to Venus’s “sinful desires” and “hellish lust.” His Venus is demonic, a Circean sorceress exploiting voluptuous pleasures to insulate his hero from human feeling and divine salvation. In her grotto (which Wagner originally called “The Mount of Venus,” until he was warned that it would provoke the ribaldry of medical students<sup>37</sup>) *Tannhäuser* is literally enthralled, as if drugged, and, later, when he attempts to describe this sybaritic sojourn, Wolfram retorts “Disgusting fellow! Profane not my ears!” Wagner had been willing to amplify the first-act ballet to offer the Paris audience a simulation of vice in action, but was told that he had to remove it to the second act, since many of the Opéra’s regulars were late-comers, for whom the dancers were the chief

<sup>34</sup> Letter of Bertrand Jouvin to J.-L. Heugel, *Le Ménestrel* 885 (13 Sep. 1863).

<sup>35</sup> Max Nordau, *Aus dem wahren Milliardenlande: Pariser Studien und Bilder*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1878), quoted in Grey, “*Eine Kapitulation*,” 93.

<sup>36</sup> Offenbach to Ludovic Halévy (2 Jul. 1864): “Two or three characters will try (two or four verses each) to sing. Then Pâris will come out and speak his tune. Something like a parody of *Tannhäuser* is what’s called for – it can be funny and that’s what we’re missing even in the finale.” *Lettres à Henri Meilhac et Ludovic Halévy*, ed. Philippe Goninet (Paris: Séguier, 1994), 66. Johann Nestroy had already produced a successful three-act parody of Wagner’s opera in 1857. His Venus wonders whether she’s “losing her touch.”

<sup>37</sup> Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the erotic impulse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 78, citing *Mein Leben*.

attraction.<sup>38</sup> Wagner's simulation paled in the face of the actual sexual commerce between the stage and the stalls.

Thirteen years later, Offenbach created the first version of *Orphée aux enfers*, whose climactic orgy seems to say to Wagner "You called that a bacchanal? This is what a bacchanal should be!" Wagner's inhibition in portraying unbridled sensuality was also noted by Charles Baudelaire, who, in a review of *Lohengrin*, complained that, although Wagner loved feudal pomp, enthusiastic crowds and "human electricity," he "has not represented here the turbulence that in a case like this would be manifested by a plebeian [*roturière*] mob. Even the apex of his most violent tumult expresses nothing but the delirium of people who are used to the rules of etiquette ... Its liveliest intoxication still maintains the rhythm of decency."<sup>39</sup>

The taunt is even more patent in *La belle Hélène*. Venus may remain offstage, but she is the motive force of everything that happens, first by coupling Léda and the swan to produce Héléne, next by promising Pâris the most beautiful woman in the world, and then by stimulating Héléne's libido. The goddess's machinations go unchallenged by any equal force, and illicit love, indeed adultery, triumphs. This Venus resembles a fairy godmother, bestowing boons and benisons on lovers who belong together. Wagner's Venus and what she stands for seem frumpy in comparison. If we turn to *Tristan und Isolde*, which opened during the same season as *La belle Hélène*, the protracted Liebestod comes across as perverse in its solemnity when set against Pâris and Héléne sailing off into the Aegean sunset. Similarly, seen as a variant of the idiotic cuckold Ménélas, King Marke loses a good deal of his dignity.

Offenbach's organic reaction to the "grand style" had always been mockery, whether its exponent was Bellini, Meyerbeer, or Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. For him, it was the big lie whose pretensions had to be exposed. And, as Matthew Smith neatly puts it, "Laughter was always the enemy of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the pin that punctured the over-inflated balloon ... Of all the exclusions of the Wagnerian stage, laughter is perhaps the most completely barred, and would be the most corrosive if it were admitted."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> "Bericht über die Aufführung des 'Tannhäuser' in Paris" (1861), *loc. cit.*; in English *RWPW*, III, 351–52. In 1874 Wagner cut off reading Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* to his wife because "there is too much licentiousness of which women can have no part." Cosima Wagner, *Tagebücher* (28 Jan. 1874).

<sup>39</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris" (1861), *Œuvres complètes*, 1229–30.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew Wilson Smith, *The total work of art. From Bayreuth to cyberspace* (London: Routledge, 2007), 115. Balloons, of course, float, and their buoyancy and lightness would more accurately characterize Offenbach, whereas the swollen nature of Wagner's pretensions suggests a bladder.

Smith's remark had been foreshadowed by Debussy who wrote in 1903 that Offenbach's talent for irony enabled him to "make use of the false, puffed-up quality of the music... to discover the hidden element of farce concealed in it and capitalize on it."<sup>41</sup> Anyone whose ears ring to the opening strains of the Mount Olympus scene in *Orphée aux enfers*, with the Greek gods prostrate with boredom, has a hard time keeping a straight face when Wagner's Nordic deities strut into Valhalla. However, as Debussy pointed out, since the grand style is accepted as high art, attacks on it are misunderstood as coming from a position of inferiority or envy. Offenbach's ability to elevate comedy to heights of musical inspiration was thus underappreciated.

### Nietzsche Takes Up the Challenge

Except by Friedrich Nietzsche. By the time the first Festival strains were heard in Bayreuth, Nietzsche had abjured his early association with and promotion of Wagner. His acquaintance with Offenbach's work – a Leipzig performance of *La belle Hélène* in 1867 – predated his first meeting with Wagner; he had planned an essay on the French composer and quotes lines from the comic operas in his letters.<sup>42</sup> In his mind, Offenbach was identified with Paris, "the highest school of existence," which he had hoped to visit "to see the cancan." "As an artist, one has no home in Europe, except Paris," he would later write in *Ecce Homo*; and at the very end of his life he was to assert that "For our bodies and our souls ... a little poisoning à la parisienne is a wonderful 'redemption' – we become ourselves, we stop being horned Germans."<sup>43</sup> So when he describes Offenbach as "so marvelously Parisian" he is tendering the highest praise possible.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Alexander Faris, *Jacques Offenbach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 28. Ernst Bloch believed that Wagner contained elements of Offenbach within him, and consequently much of his work resembles parody. The salvation of Wagner is to embrace his kitsch as colportage, that is, pulp fiction. Ernst Bloch, "Rescuing Wagner through surrealist colportage," in *Heritage of our times* (1935), trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 338–45.

<sup>42</sup> Letters to Erwin Rohde (3 Nov. 1867, 1–3 Feb. 1868), Friedrich Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel: kritische Gesamtausgabe* [henceforth *BKG*], ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1975–1993), I, 2, 232, 235, 247.

<sup>43</sup> *BKG*, II, 1, 205, 212, 254, 264, 274, 276; "Warum ich so klug bin," §5 *Ecce Homo*, in Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [henceforth *WKG*], ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967–2003), III, 1, 286–97; letter to Heinrich Köselitz [Peter Gast] (18 Nov. 1888), *BKG*, III, 5, 478–79; Georges Liébert, *Nietzsche and music*, trans. David Pellauer and Graham Parkes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 269, note 111. Köselitz was unconvinced and recommended *The Mikado* for its lack of vulgarity. 16 Nov. 1888, *Die Briefe Peter Gasts an Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Arthur Mendt, 2 vols. (Munich: Nietzsche-Gesellschaft, 1924), II, 166–7.

This early enthusiasm was eclipsed by his pursuit of the German “genius” that Wagner incarnated for Nietzsche at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. He was even willing to dilute his concept of the Dionysian in *The birth of tragedy* to align it with the cult of Wagner. No more. The “*freier Geist*,” “the free spirit,” could no longer be contained by Wagnerian formulations: “he who will be free must seek freedom in himself, for no one receives it as a miraculous gift.”<sup>44</sup> When he attended the Bayreuth Festival performance of the *Ring* in 1876, he could not conceal his disgust. Hucksterism had eclipsed idealism. Wagner was an impostor, peddling his musical nostrums to a gullible German public, pandering to their spiritual indolence and cultural smugness. Nietzsche became even more alarmed two years later with what he heard from Wagner of the nascent *Parsifal* and its etiolated Christianity. The completed text, sent to him by the composer, struck him, in its praise of celibacy, as a denial of the life-force. The disillusionment was traumatic.

As he cast round for an antidote to grandiose ideals and messianic aspirations, Nietzsche recovered his taste for “simple foods,” musically embodied by Mozart’s *Requiem*. His new touchstones were clarity and psychological analysis, qualities he found more readily in French than in German thought. At the same time, he became cognizant of the undeniable popularity of comic opera all over Europe. Throughout the late 1870s and early 1880s, the French *opéra comique* and Viennese operetta were gaining ground internationally; Gilbert and Sullivan were being pirated throughout the English-speaking world; the Spanish zarzuela flourished. “What is the dominant melody in Europe today, *the musical obsession?*” Nietzsche asked, and answered himself thus: “An operetta tune (except of course for the deaf and Wagner).”<sup>45</sup> After promoting Bizet’s *Carmen*, as part of his call to “*méditerraniser la musique*,” he nominated his old favorite Offenbach, the puncturer of mendacious megalomania, as the salutary anti-Wagner. His praise of Bizet’s music as light, graceful, stylish, and, above all, loveable, is just as applicable to Offenbach.

To sharpen the contrast, he praised Offenbach as a Jew, since Jews “have touched on the highest form of spirituality in modern Europe: this is brilliant buffoonery.”<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche’s own anti-Semitism had always been

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *WKG*, VII, 34. Nietzsche’s major statements on Wagner have been conveniently collected as *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth. Der Fall Wagner. Nietzsche contra Wagner* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1969).

<sup>45</sup> From the *Nachlaß*, quoted in Yon, *Jacques Offenbach*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> These remarks first became known in the compendium of his *Nachgelassene Fragmente* made by his sister and entitled *Der Wille zur Macht*. Since modern editions of the *Nachlaß* differ in their



half-hearted, a tribute to Wagner's influence; it was shed as soon as he had observed its blatant display in Bayreuth. In his notebooks of the 1880s Nietzsche proposed an exemplum of Jewish genius, epitomized in Heine and Offenbach, meant to attack Wagner on his own ground. Offenbach's "witty and exuberant satire" "is a real redemption from the sentimental and basically degenerate musicians of German Romanticism."<sup>47</sup> "Degenerate" or "decadent" [*entartete*] had been Nietzsche's catch-all pejorative for weakness and mediocrity; now he used it to mean excess sophistication, the over-refinement of modern life, "hypertrophy of values and subtlety."<sup>48</sup> Rebutting those who characterized Offenbach's music as depraved and meretricious, Nietzsche lauded him as "ingenuous to the point of banality (– he does not wear *makeup* –)," unlike the cosmetically sensual Viennese school or the crypto-homosexual Wagner.<sup>49</sup>

If one understands genius in an artist to be the highest freedom under the law, divine lightness, frivolity in the most serious things, then Offenbach has far more right to the name "Genius" than Wagner. Wagner is difficult, ponderous; nothing is more alien to him than those moments of high-spirited perfection such as this Harlequin Offenbach achieves five, six times in each of his buffooneries.<sup>50</sup>

Nietzsche's suspicion that "Musikdrama" discounted Dionysian lyricism for dramatic illustration led him to the conclusion that Wagner's equalizing of music and drama was wrong-headed: one or the other had to dominate. In Wagner, drama came first, the music composed to fit it; whereas in Offenbach the words were inhabited and heightened by the music. This conviction was affirmed two years later when Nietzsche attended revivals of *La Périchole*, *La fille du tambour-major*, and *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*.

contents and numbering, for the sake of clarity I cite the widely available if discredited *Wille zur Macht* as *The will to power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. T. Hollingshead (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), §832, 439. The word I have translated as spirituality, *Geistigkeit*, denotes intellect and vivacity. Nietzsche also praised the Jews, a race perfected by evolution through numerous phases, for being inoculated against the nationalism that tainted much European art.

<sup>47</sup> 1886, *KSA*, XII, 361; *The will to power*, §833, 439. In 1932, just before Hitler's ascent to power, Heinrich Berl proclaimed Nietzsche to be nothing less than "the prophet of the Jewish spirit." Berl, *Das Judentum in der Musik* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, 1924), 92.

<sup>48</sup> W. D. Williams, *Nietzsche and the French. A study of the influence of Nietzsche's French reading on his thought and writing* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), 153–54.

<sup>49</sup> *Der Wille zur Macht* in *KSA*, XII, 344. The reference to makeup is part of Nietzsche's vilification of Wagner as an "actor." In 1888 Nietzsche declared the times to be the golden age for the actor, because they discounted and disparaged authenticity and preferred image-making and simulation.

<sup>50</sup> 1884. *Ibid.* *Will to power*, §834, 439. Also see Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 76. Harlequin is my translation of "Hanswurst," a term of praise in Nietzsche's last books.

They confirmed his enthusiasm for Offenbach's classical taste and shrewd choice of librettists. "Offenbach's libretti have something enchanting about them and are truly the only ones in opera so far that have worked *to the benefit of poetry*."<sup>51</sup> This is another backhanded slap at Wagner, always his own *Dichter*. Wagner's self-sufficiency works against him.

### Earnest Intensity vs. the Pleasure Principle

Eduard Hanslick had already pointed out that Wagner was the only composer who could be compared to Offenbach as an *homme de théâtre*, "an eminent theatrical intelligence and brilliant director"; however, unchallenged at his own privately subsidized playhouse, Wagner had lost his sense of proportion and insisted on the immutability of his creations. Offenbach, with a keener sense of theatre and the incalculable benefit of working in collaboration, continually refined his work throughout rehearsals in dialogue with his librettists.<sup>52</sup> Wagner's music, errors and all, was graven in stone like the tablets of Mt Sinai; Offenbach's was fluid, mutable, and open to refinement, sensitive to the responses of the audience. This led Arthur Kahane, Max Reinhardt's dramaturge, to turn the tables when he declared, in 1922, "*Gesamtkunstwerk*" is the preferred term in a profoundly programmatic Germany. It has been achieved only [in Offenbach's compositions]."<sup>53</sup>

For Nietzsche, Wagner was not so much an all-round man of the theatre as a *Schauspieler*, a ham actor and, indeed, "a mimomaniac."<sup>54</sup> In 1888 Nietzsche published *The case of Wagner (Der Fall Wagner)*, a full-throated polemic that again pitted the pleasure principle of Offenbach against Wagner's earnest intensity. The charge of decadence is deflected from French *opéra bouffe* to the German composer's morbid aestheticism, obsessed with the problems of a hysteric and galvanized by the stimulant of mindless brutality. He ventriloquizes Wagner:

*Sursoum! Boumboum!* [...] Virtue is always right, even against counterpoint [...] We will never allow that music should "serve as relaxation," that

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Heinrich Köselitz (21 Mar. 1888), *BKG*, III, 5, 275. Meilhac and Halévy were also praised in his notebooks as "the best poets to whom my taste promises immortality" (Oct. 1888, *KSA*, XIII, 619).

<sup>52</sup> Hanslick, *Aus meinem Leben*, II, 82–86. Hanslick wrote that "Certain very virtuous and very classical German critics, who, smug in their disdain for Offenbach, speak of his operettas as if anybody could do as much, may perhaps condescend to admit that, to write the score of *Contes d'Hoffmann*, you need to be more than a 'street singer' or 'a composer of the French cancan.'"

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Kahane, "Phantasie über Offenbach als Vorwort," in *Orpheus in der Unterwelt von Offenbach*. With color illustrations by Max Rée (Berlin: F. Fontane, 1922), unpag.

<sup>54</sup> *Nietzsche contra Wagner. Aktenstücke eines Psychologen* (1889), 132.

it should “amuse” us, “give us pleasure.” *Never do we take pleasure in anything!* – we are lost if we start to think of art the way hedonists do [...]

Drink up, my friends. Drink the potions of this art! Nowhere will you find a more agreeable way to enervate your spirit, to lose your manhood beneath a rose bush ... Oh, this old magician! This Klingsor of Klingsors! How he wars on us *free spirits* this way! How he speaks to all the cowardice of the modern psyche, in his siren’s accent! [...]

Ah, this old robber. He robs us of our youths, he even robs our women and drags them into his den – Ah, this old Minotaur! The price we have had to pay for him! Every year trains of the most beautiful maidens and youths are led into his labyrinth, so that he may devour them – every year all of Europe intones the words, “off to Crete! off to Crete!”<sup>55</sup>

These passages are craftily interwoven with Offenbachian allusion. Wagner’s anti-hedonist stance is heralded by the braggart General Boum from *La Grande-Duchesse* and, after a bypath into Klingsor’s garden, we are despatched with the first-act finale of *La belle Hélène*, not sailing to Cythaera, but to Crete, envisaged as the soul-destroying bull-pen of Bayreuth reached by special excursion trains. Nietzsche was so proud of his pastiche that, boasting of it in a letter, he referred to this exercise in philippic parody as “Operettenmusik.”<sup>56</sup>

Devoted Wagnerians have tried to explain away Nietzsche’s intemperate diatribe by attributing it to the philosopher’s growing dementia. Naming it “that lamentable squib,” Wagner’s Victorian translator William Ashton Ellis stated outright that its author must have been insane.<sup>57</sup> This belief that Nietzsche’s predilection for light opera was a pathological symptom has been dismissed by Frederick R. Love as a “crude oversimplification,” given Nietzsche’s youthful enthusiasm for the genre and his long-held belief in the spontaneous and voluntary aspect of music.<sup>58</sup>

Nietzsche’s newfound faith in the holiness of laughter and parody as an ideal type of literature would naturally embrace Mozartian virtuosity as a kindred form. When he declares in a letter that “the most strict structural principles and gaiety in music belong together,”<sup>59</sup> what is more natural than to praise Offenbach as the epitome of this union? Arthur Kahane went so far as to suggest that “Offenbach is a wish-fulfillment dream of

<sup>55</sup> *Der Fall Wagner. Ein Musikanten-Problem* [1888], *WKG*, VI, 3, 20, 37–38.

<sup>56</sup> To Adolf Ruthardt (7 Aug. 1888), *WKG*, III, 5, 382; to Heinrich Köselitz (24 Aug. 1888), III, 5, 398.

<sup>57</sup> *RWPW*, V, xiv. One of Nietzsche’s earliest American commentators granted that *The case of Wagner* was “offensive” but needed to be seen in context. William Mackintire Salter, *Nietzsche the thinker. A study* (New York: Henry Holt, 1917), 89.

<sup>58</sup> Frederick R. Love, “Nietzsche, music and madness,” *Music and Letters* LX, 2 (Apr. 1979): 186–203.

<sup>59</sup> To Ruthardt, *loc. cit.*

Nietzsche's. Offenbach is Nietzsche set to the fiddle and laughter, or the birth of impudence from the spirit of music."<sup>60</sup>

### Mistaking Sunrise for High Noon

When Nietzsche's attacks on Wagner appeared, Offenbach was no longer alive; but, had he been, it is unlikely that he would have commented. During his lifetime, Offenbach refrained from public statements about his contemporaries.<sup>61</sup> His only extended remarks on Wagner appear in an out-of-the-way journal in 1879, the single issue *Paris-Murcie*, sold to aid those who had lost their homes in the floods of the river Murcie. He began with a disclaimer that, since most musicians have delicate nerves, harsh criticism should be avoided. Still, he wondered if the younger generation might display more talent, were it not

paralyzed by that Medusa's head that serves as their objective: Richard Wagner. They take this powerful individual as the leader of a school. The methods born with him will die with him. He proceeds from no one, no one will be born of him. A marvelous example of spontaneous generation ... An aurora borealis mistaken for the sun.<sup>62</sup>

Where are the progeny spawned by Wagner's operas which offer influence but not inspiration (a nice distinction)? Musicians have to please their contemporaries, not posterity, Offenbach opines, hence "music of the future" is an oxymoron.

When Offenbach wrote this, not long before his death, his own fame and popularity were on the wane. In the Third Republic, the unprincipled exuberance of the Second Empire was mistrusted as a prelude to defeat; Garnier's unfinished Opéra house was so identified with the sins of the past that funding for its completion raised questions in the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>63</sup> Chastened, sedate audiences required more sentiment, more sententiousness, more spectacle.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur Kahane, *Blätter des Deutschen Theaters* (1922), quoted in Paul Walter Jacob, *Jacques Offenbach in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), 166.

<sup>61</sup> In 1972 the artist Marcel Broodthaers invented a fictional letter of Offenbach to Wagner; this was a weapon in his feud against what he saw as the megalomania of Joseph Beuys in which he cast himself as Offenbach and Beuys as Wagner. See Stefan Germer, "Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys," *October* 45 (Summer 1988): 63–75.

<sup>62</sup> Reprinted in *Le siècle d'Offenbach*. Cahiers Renaud-Barrault 24, 9–11.

<sup>63</sup> See Michael Strasser, "The Société Nationale and its adversaries: the musical politics of *l'invasion germanique* in the 1870s," *19th-Century Music* 24, 3 (Spring 2001): 234–35.

PRIX 10 C. **L'ANTI-WAGNER** PRIX : 10 C.

PROTESTATION CONTRE LA REPRESENTATION ALLEMANDE DE L'EDEN-THEATRE

A NOS LECTEURS

Mardi prochain, 26 avril 1887, M. Lamoureux, momentanément directeur de l'Eden-Théâtre, offrira à la population parisienne, la première du *Lohengrin* de RICHARD WAGNER.

Ce monsieur fort peu français, qui sans doute a oublié nos désastres de 1870, se défend de ce jouanque de patriotisme en disant que L'ART N'A PAS DE PATRIE.

Sans être chauvin, on peut faire remarquer à M. Lamoureux, qu'il a fort mal choisi son moment pour célébrer la gloire et la musique du musicien anti-français.

RICHARD WAGNER, personne ne l'a oublié, est l'individu qui au moment de nos désastres, nous a insulté dans une brochure restée célèbre.

Cet individu à mœurs infâmes a également publié un poème dont nous donnons plus bas quelques vers.

Nous laissons la plume à d'autres plus autorisés que nous, et nous nous laissons un devoir de reproduire l'article de M. Mermeix, rédacteur à la France, un de ceux qui n'ont pas oublié!

M. Grandvauxin, le poète franc-comtois, avait publié l'année dernière, l'article ci-dessous.

M. Carthou avait compris et des lors s'était abstenu, il a fallu que M. Lamoureux évoque encore le spectre insulteur du mangeur de choucroute allemand.

L'Editeur.

M. LAMOUREUX offrant à Wagner l'or français provenant des représentations faites à l'Eden-Théâtre.

2.3. *L'Anti-Wagner*, "a Protest against the German Performance [of *Lohengrin*] at the Eden Theatre," Paris, 1887. The conductor Lamoureux is shown presenting Wagner with French money.

Offenbach obliged, his *opéras bouffes* diversifying into *opéras comiques*, *opérettes*, *féeries*, *pièces à grand spectacle*, even as he was beginning to be eclipsed by younger French composers as well as by the Viennese school of Strauss and von Suppé. Even in his adopted country, his German antagonist was gaining ground. Stéphane Mallarmé worshipped at the altar of "the god Richard Wagner," dismissing the recent French school as a wilderness overgrown with weeds of Meyerbeerian opera and "decadent" operetta.

In Proust's *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* (1918), Robert de Saint-Loup despises his father for having "yawned at Wagner and gone crazy over Offenbach."<sup>64</sup> Wagner, comfortably ensconced in Bayreuth, secure in wealth and fame, could observe his influence spreading far and wide. Yet, as Cosima's diary attests, the specter of Offenbach haunted him. When his great rival died in 1880, Wagner could not help but moderate his prejudices. On the principle of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, he repeated his earliest estimation: "Look at Offenbach. He writes like the divine Mozart. It is a fact that the French possess the secret of these things."<sup>65</sup> Germans, however, must perforce move in another direction, pursuing their *Sonderweg* to a different kind of divinity.

<sup>64</sup> "Saint-Loup was not intelligent enough to understand that intellectual quality has nothing to do with adherence to a specific aesthetic formula." Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré (Paris: La Pléiade, 1954), I, 733.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Wehmeyer, *Höllengalopp und Götterdämmerung*, 197.