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Wagnerism, as M. Teodor de Wyzewa and other subtle critics have pointed out, does not consist simply in admiring the works of Richard Wagner. Indeed, there is much in Wagner's dramas and writings that is not admirable. The works are what they are — examples of an artistic theory, and this theory on which Wagner laid unceasing stress calls for the fusion of all forms of art in a common intention. It is an interesting question how far the Wagnerian spirit has entered into the works of modern poets, painters, and men of letters.

The poets we know.

Stéphane Mallarmé, for instance, this bizarre poet who for the last twenty years has published incomprehensible poems in obscure reviews under his high-sounding pseudonym. Him we know and his dark rival, Adore Floupette, and their school of imitators, Wagnerolaters and pessimists. It was not long ago that men instructed in letters saw no indignity in asking whether Mallarmé was a fool or a mystifier. But that is past. No one to-day questions the place of Mallarmé as an artist of high and delicate attainments. He is master of his art —

Un art bien élaboré,  
Et du vulgaire abhoré

His belief, like that of the Parnassians, was that the thoughts and images commonly called poetical may be better expressed in prose, and that it is not the business of poetry to translate landscapes, morals, and obvious sentiments into tortured language. And the poet's business, then?

It was to "evoke in the soul musical emotions, different from those music can evoke." Recognizing the kinship between certain syllables and certain emotions, M. Mallarmé has endeavored to perfect this poetic language. He has tried to build a symphony of words, in various modes, rhythms, and sonorities. Over all he places the musical development. And for this very reason he chooses banal subjects, so that not even the most eviscerated thought may clog the march of the melody.

I have compared him with the Parnassians, but there is a wonderful difference — Wagnerian.

Let me illustrate this.

You know Paul Verlaine, this golden, vagrom man, who sings as unpremeditatedly as Burns sang; who plays on words as a naïf guitarist teases the strings, and he is of Parnassus. It is the note of the school — improvisation. The Parnassians improvise; Mallarmé composes. Leconte de Lisle, Villiers de L'Isle Adam, Mendes — all improvisers, wantoning with chance attractions by the way, charmed by the incidental. Mallarmé develops his melody according to a definite plan. A conscientious logic creates the theme with — but nothing more — its necessary expansion. Neither a painter nor a musician, he has chosen with extreme felicity the images, rhythms, and sounds most adequate for his subject. "Les Fleurs" — it is the adagio of a romantic sonata or one of Bach's preludes.

Clearly this poet is a product of the Wagnerian theory.

Of the Wagnerists of this country Mr. James Gibbons Huneker is the most hierarchal, and here is a subject made to his hand. One other suggestion: Mallarmé, like Wagner, sees all things as symbols. A hospital? It is the life of man. A bell-ringer? The poet, clamant for the ideal. And a rose is Herodias.

Other poets have believed that poetry should be pure music, but Mallarmé believes that it should signify something and indeed create a mode of life. Create a life? Poetry, art of rhythms and sound, ought, being a music, to create emotions; emotions are inseparable from the ideas that provoke them; grief and pleasure do not exist; there are only sad or joyous emotions. Therefore, in poetry the poet must give not only the emotions but their causes. The emotions evoked by syllables

## WAGNERIAN POETS AND PAINTERS



are so delicate and tenuous that they require the adjunct of precise ideas. Mallarmé's theory is that the object of poetry is emotions justified by the subjects. And, as one has said, his theory is quadrate with Wagner's theory of art. But the painters? To be sure there is Puvis de Chavannes, whose work is in the Wagnerian spirit. Unfortunately it is not in the academies that one finds Wagnerian art or art of any kind. The painters, since they began to live like other folks and love their own wives to the neglect of their neighbors' wives, have given up all concern for art; like the agitated Hebrews they are interested only in the laws of supply and demand. Naturally they do not create works of art, for which, in a democratic society, there can never be a demand. They employ the process—design and color—but they have given up artistic work. They do not, in Wagner's strenuous phrase, create life. To create life—it is the duty of art.

You remember the Master's argument, which is indeed a page from Schopenhauer. The world in which we live and which we call real is in truth merely a creation of our souls. The soul can not go out of itself, and the phenomena which it believes exterior to itself are but its own ideas. To see, to understand, is to create appearances and, therefore, to create life. Art creates consciously.

Painters descriptive and anecdotal; but this is mere literature. But recall a painting of the symphonist Rembrandt; Rubens, whose intense color schemes suggest at times a real vision of life; or Watteau's sad elegancies, gracious as the andante of certain of Mozart's quatuors. It is evident that emotional painting is no new thing, that there were generals before Agamemnon. To-day, however, the artist faces a new problem. The way is not simple. The old masters have proved that painting may be descriptive of real sensations or suggestive of real emotions. But painting can not be both. To-day the necessity of choice is greater than ever—a choice which is distinctly in the line of Wagner's art. Degas has chosen; he describes; he represents the things he sees, and he is creating life. Puvis has chosen. Between them are the artists who deform their descriptions in the vain hope of making them poetic.

In France Wagner's influence has been more widely felt than in any other country—you see it in Manet and Cezanne, in Monet, even in Cazin—this simple, though rather coarsely sentimental painter of grays—in Odilon Redon's landscapes of fantastic desolation and even in the cruel and bitter visions of Felicien Rops.

The Wagnerian spirit is there, but one sees it as through a glass darkly.



NORDAU

*If you happen to be born in a little Magyar town,  
Where the student flicks the Jew and the trooper rides him down,  
Then a modest hate of man is not wholly out of place  
And the high gods may forgive you for a bitterness of race.*

*But its little then one knows  
Of the golden life that goes*

*In the world where God gave sunlight and the artist gave the rose.*

*And when you walk abroad from the little Magyar town  
A new world—like the trooper—rides your old ideals down.  
And your little copper counters, when you test them, do not ring,  
And the warrant of the Beschdin is an unregarded thing.*

*If you ask the men you meet, "What's the latest thing in dyes?"  
"What's the newest thing in white-goods?" they will stare with troubled eyes.  
"Has science weighed the sunbeam?" They will tell you—who but they?—  
Of the sculptured stones of Chartres and the chansons of Bellay.*

*They have news of Botticelli and Piero Cosimo,  
Of the word that Plato whispered they converse as they go—  
Of the subtle moods of music and the wayward moods of art,  
Of the dream that came at twilight and the hope that will not part.*

*But "What's the great equation of the Ego and 'I am'?"  
And "What's the weight of sunbeams?" and "What's the price of ham?"  
They walk on toward the morning and the stars are young and glad,  
While you glower on a mile-stone and whisper, "They are mad!"*

*Man, man, who cares or knows?*

*In the golden life that goes*

*In the world where God gave sunlight and the artist gave the rose.*