

Adolphe Appia, *Les maîtres chanteurs de Nuremberg*: An Introduction and Translation

Translator's Introduction by Cathy Cox

The Swiss scenery artist Adolphe Appia, born in Geneva in 1862, is thought by many in the theatrical community to be a forefather of modern theater, particularly for his radical ideas concerning stage lighting. His artistic interest in stage production was motivated and inspired early on by his passion for Wagner's music dramas; evidence for this is apparent in his first published writing, *La mise en scène du drame wagnérien* of 1895, which includes notes for a hypothetical production of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungen*. Around the same time, Appia wrote scenarios for productions of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Parsifal*.¹ Appia subsequently produced a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* at La Scala in 1923 and staged *Die Walküre* in Basel in 1925. Although Joseph Urban's 1919 production of *Parsifal* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York showed clear analogies to Appia's designs of 1896 (Beacham 1994:141), Appia's suggestions for the production of *Die Meistersinger* remained obscure until well after his death in 1928. The essay regarding *Die Meistersinger* was not published until 1986 with the appearance of volume II of Appia's *Oeuvres complètes* under the auspices of the Swiss Theater Society; the text following the present article marks its first translation and publication in English.

Although Appia left behind sketches and drawings for productions of Wagner's other music dramas, none for *Die Meistersinger* have been found. The lack of sketches has led some scholars to infer that Appia had little interest in the work.² *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* does set itself apart from Wagner's other music dramas: it was conceived as a comic opera, ending happily with a marriage (although the actual wedding occurs only after the opera has ended); and Wagner gave very specific indications in the score for both the historical time and place of the setting—sixteenth-century Nuremberg. This specificity of time and place ostensibly limits the possible artistic interpretation of the work for the stage designer, should the designer wish to stay true to Wagner's wishes—which perhaps explains Appia's apparent lack of interest in the work. But the absence of sketches does not prove that none existed; in fact, there is some evidence that Appia had revisited his production notes for *Die Meistersinger* as late as 1926, two years before his death. In a short essay entitled "Das Problem der Stilbühne bei den Werken Richard Wagners," written for a musicological congress in

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Leipzig in 1925, Appia's references to *Die Meistersinger* demonstrate that he had, indeed, been thinking about possible stage interpretations for the work (Appia 1992:480–81).

A reading of Appia's production notes for *Die Meistersinger* can nonetheless serve both to gather further insights into the opera itself, and to gain better understanding of Appia's ideas through a practical application of his theories. But first it is important to review the main points of Appia's theories through a historical lens, focusing on the issues of theatrical production to which he was reacting.

Wagner's 1868 Première Production and Cosima's 1888 Production

The première of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* took place in 1868 in Munich, and the production was closely monitored by the dramatist-composer himself. In addition to his indications in the score, Wagner insisted that the interior architectural features of the church in Act I and the houses in the street scene of Act II be made of three-dimensional sets and not just painted flats, the latter being the conventional means of stage design at the time. King Ludwig, who was funding the project, sent the court scenery painters Angelo Quaglio and Heinrich Döll to make sketches of churches and houses of Nuremberg in preparation for the designs of both Acts I and II. This upset Wagner, since the actual historical buildings to which he refers in the opera were not exactly the same as the structures he wished to have in the stage production: the Katharinenkirche of the first act was in reality rather plain and not the spiraling gothic structure he had imagined. Hans Sachs's house was not located at a street corner, as he had specified in the stage directions to Act II, but in the middle of a row of houses. In the end, Wagner's wishes won out and historical accuracy was sacrificed in favor of the artist's conception. The stage production on the whole was, however, much in keeping with the prevailing naturalist-realist movement, which insisted upon close attention to stylistic detail. A reporter for the *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung* wrote of the production "What one sees here are . . . complete cardboard buildings, copied from real life, and streets, squares and perspectives so life-like as to deceive one into thinking them real" (quoted in Bauer 1983:182). Thus, despite the historical inaccuracies mentioned above, the visual impression of sixteenth-century Nuremberg was recreated as realistically as possible and with much attention to detail.

Appia was not present at the 1868 première of *Die Meistersinger* (he was six years old at the time). He did, however, attend the 1888 Bayreuth production while he was studying in Dresden. This production, overseen by

Wagner's widow Cosima, was modeled after the première and thus preserved the realist-naturalist aesthetic of the original staging. The few changes producers Max and Gotthold Brückner made to the original stage settings were in favor of increased realism and historical accuracy: most significantly, the interior of the church in Act I was made architecturally plainer so it would more closely resemble the actual Katharinenkirche. Max Brückner was particularly well known at the time as a champion of the realist-naturalist aesthetic, with his painstaking attention to minute details in his painted and constructed sets. Appia, however, was unimpressed by the Brückner brothers' production.

Such painstaking detail, as practiced by Max Brückner, was one of the things that disturbed Appia about conventional practices in theater production in the late 1800s. He felt that such over-attention to detail served only to distract the audience from the drama and music. He called instead for simplicity, recommending the stage to be set "only so far as is necessary for the comprehension of the poetic text; a mere indication is enough to enlighten us to the nature of the visible environment" (quoted in Beacham 1994:23).³ The opulent grandeur of conventional, detail-oriented stage designs, he felt, merely appealed to the fancies of the common masses and had little inherent artistic value. That most of this detail was achieved through painted flats only worsened the situation for Appia, who found it absurd that real, living actors should be made to interact with flat, two-dimensional scenery. In order for the audience to be convinced of the reality of the drama, Appia argued, the actors must be able to interact directly with the stage setting; this can happen only if the scenery is composed of real "practicable" three-dimensional objects, which are then animated through living, moving light.

Thus Appia was disappointed by the 1888 production of *Die Meistersinger* he saw in Bayreuth, as he was earlier by the Bayreuth productions he attended of *Parsifal* in 1882 and *Tristan und Isolde* in 1886. Although Appia saw in Wagner a great dramatist and composer—Appia used the term "poet-musician" to describe the union of these two art forms in one artist—and admired Wagner's operas and writings to the point of obsession, Appia felt that Wagner's creative genius failed when it came to the *mise en scène*, or stage production. The conventional staging of Wagner's works failed to reciprocate, in Appia's mind, the revolutionary essence and power of the music and drama. In a critique of the 1882 *Parsifal*, the last production the composer oversaw before his death, Wagner himself appeared to recognize the shortcomings with his words, "in this field of music dramaturgy, alas, all is still so new and hidden in the dust of bad routine" (quoted in Beacham 1994:11).⁴ Appia reflected upon this issue in his retrospective

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essay of 1921, *Theatrical Experiences and Personal Investigations*:

On the one hand, the director is confronted by Wagner's traditional conception of staging practice; on the other, by a music-poetic text ostensibly liberated from that tradition and not influenced at all by contemporary staging. This contradiction reveals a fundamental conflict in the dramatist's thinking . . . (quoted in Beacham 1994:43)⁵

Appia's distress over this contradiction, which he found in a medium and of a music for which he otherwise felt so passionate, incited him to begin formulating his own theory of stage production. This ultimate purpose of Appia's theory, then, was to demonstrate how the stage production might finally be integrated and united with the musical and dramatic elements of Wagnerian opera and music drama.

Appia's General Theory on Stage Productions

Appia believed that the inner life or essence of music drama is revealed in the music, and thus all other elements in the staging of opera must in some way be hierarchically subordinated to the music. He sums up this concept in his publication of 1899, *Die Musik und die Inszenierung (Music and the Art of the Theater)*:

[A] dramatic conception which requires musical expression in order to manifest itself must arise from the hidden world of our inner life, because this life cannot be expressed except through music, and music can express only that life. The poet-musician encompasses this vision in his *music*. Through language, he gives it specific dramatic form and composes the poetic-musical text, the *score*. This text imposes on the *actor* his role, which is already living and defined for him to assume. The proportions of this role determine the form of the actual arrangement of *three-dimensional* elements (the point of contact between the living actor and the inanimate settings); the degree and nature of these elements determine the *spatial arrangement* of the setting, which in turn controls the *lighting* and *painted flats*.

This hierarchy is composed organically: the soul of the drama (music) provides it with life, and by its pulsations determines every movement of the whole organism in their proportion and sequence. (Appia 1962:26)

Thus, the actor mediates between the elements of music and scenic design. Appia emphasized the importance of making full use of three-dimensional space in scenic design because it facilitates the actor's ability to relate directly to the set, supporting the impression of on-stage reality in the eyes of

the audience. Appia raised this same issue in his discussion of the problem of scenic realism in the production of *Die Meistersinger*:

For the drama of the poet-musician, the scenic realism obviously has to have a completely different scope [from that of spoken drama], since the music creates the environment and since this creation, which lasts as long as the drama itself, animates and justifies in the eyes of the public every minute of the spectacle. A dramatic action that needs music to express itself is of such a nature that the material notions necessary in spoken drama are superfluous to it. By renouncing the inanimate signs of the painted scenery, nothing is sacrificed that lighting cannot replace; the “practical” reality of the objects are then only justified insofar as they favor the lighting or they enter into a direct relation with the actor. (Appia 1986:251)⁶

This theme regarding the importance of lighting over painted scenery is found throughout Appia’s writings. For Appia, stage lighting achieves its expressive power most specifically through the creative shaping and contouring of shade and shadow. Such subtle variance in the intensity and directionality of stage lighting, Appia argues, is completely lost on painted flats, which can only be lit or unlit. In *Die Musik*, Appia goes so far as to claim that lighting is the aspect of stage production that can most closely correspond to music in terms of expression:

Light is to production what music is to the score: the expressive element as opposed to external signs; and as in the case of music, light can express only that which belongs to ‘the inner essence’ of all vision . . . The two elements have an analogous existence. Each of them needs some external object if their activity is to be put into effect: the poet, in the case of music, and the actor (by means of the spatial layout) for lighting. Both elements possess extraordinary subtlety . . . (Appia 1962:72)⁷

For Appia, then, the proper and sensitive use of lighting breathes life and energy into the otherwise inanimate stage design. The spatial and temporal dimensions of Appia’s lighting technique serve a symbolic function, aiming to match the expression of the actors and, ultimately, the music.

Appia’s Vision for *Die Meistersinger*

Appia begins his discussion of *Die Meistersinger* by contrasting this work with *Tristan und Isolde*.⁸ In Appia’s view, the dramatic action on stage in *Tristan und Isolde* was exclusively interior in nature (176), while in *Die Meistersinger* “exterior life plays the principal role on stage” (249). It is clear from the opening of Appia’s essay that this work caused him some difficulty in its apparent focus on exterior life both in the music and text, especially as

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he found that the intensity of the music was out of proportion with text and stage indications for the work. However, once he refocused his attention away from the exterior action towards the interior soul of the main character, Hans Sachs, he found the inspiration he needed to proceed with his scenario for the staging of the work.

Appia's interpretative focus on the character of Hans Sachs shares many points in common with H. S. Chamberlain's discussion of *Die Meistersinger* in his book on Wagnerian drama (Chamberlain 1892). Appia and Chamberlain were close friends who regularly discussed Wagner's works with each other (Appia 1986:247); indeed, Chamberlain may be the "third party" to whom Appia refers in the essay—that is, the one who provides the impetus for a "clear and precise formula" for understanding the work (250). While both authors characterize the work as expressing a conflict between exterior and interior life, however, Appia's discussion is greater in detail and nuance in how this conflict plays out in the work, while Chamberlain says nothing of its staging. Thus, even though Chamberlain's ideas may have served as initial inspiration, Appia's interpretation for the work's scenario is completely his own.

For Appia, the "exterior life" of the drama involves the petty, mundane concerns of the Nuremberg residents apart from Sachs; this includes the singing competition and the love story between Eva and Walther. Indeed, Appia divides the characters of the drama into two groups: Sachs on the one hand, and everyone else on the other. Appia's characterization of Sachs as a genius poet-musician bears much resemblance to his idolatrous descriptions of Wagner himself, such that it is difficult not to draw parallels between the two throughout Appia's essay. It is Sachs' soul, which Appia finds expressed in the music, that makes up the "interior life" of the drama. The conflict between exterior and interior life is then resolved through Sachs' gradual renunciation of his own outward desires. While Appia feels this conflict between exterior and interior life is evidently expressed in the music, he sees it as his task to demonstrate how this conflict can also be underscored through the staging.

Appia points out how the conflict between exterior and interior life is represented through the regular alternation between exterior and interior settings for the scenes:

The three acts of *Die Meistersinger* consist of two interior settings and two open-air settings, alternating regularly from one to the other. The lighting will have to mark these successive oppositions and the sets and the paintwork will be subordinate to it.

The first interior setting, the aisle of a church of Nuremberg, is in turn in opposition to the second interior setting, the small workshop of

the cobbler Hans Sachs.

The first open-air setting, a crossroads in old Nuremberg, is similarly in opposition to the second open-air setting, a clearing somewhere near the city.

The four settings offer in this manner an arrangement favorable to their separate effect, and one can absorb oneself in the character of each of them without doing a disservice to the ones that frame it. (Appia 1986:252)⁹

Most of the “oppositions” Appia finds among the scene settings are immediately clear. The interior church setting of Act I stands in opposition to the exterior setting of the street scene of Act II; and the interior setting of Sachs’ studio for the first four scenes of Act III stands in opposition to the open-air setting of the final scene. The two exterior scenes may be understood in opposition to each other, as the street scene occurs as evening falls to night, while the final open-air scene occurs in mid-day; the mood of the two scenes are in opposition as well, as the street scene is full of disruptive tumult while the final scene is one of celebration.

Less clear, perhaps, is how the two interior settings stand in opposition to each other. Appia does not explain this opposition directly, but rather elaborates on these opening statements by describing the hypothetical stage directions for each scene in succession. Both interior settings are lit, at the beginning, by a ray of morning sun entering through a window, and are overtaken by light at the end. The lighting at the beginning of the first act, streaming in through a stained-glass window, helps to establish the serene nature of the church setting; Appia’s treatment of Hans Sachs’ workshop in Act III similarly establishes the hero’s studio as a sanctified space. In this way, the two interior settings seem to stand more in parallel to each other than in opposition. Perhaps it is in the more intimate and private sphere of the latter interior setting—being more closely aligned to the interior life of the poet-musician, as opposed to the public sphere of the church—that Appia’s opposition between these two settings can be found.

Given the importance of proper lighting technique to Appia’s general theory of stage production, it comes as no surprise that Appia gives particular attention to this element in his essay on staging *Die Meistersinger*. There is a subtle difference, however, between the role he assigns to the lighting in *Die Meistersinger* and the role he assigns to this element in Wagner’s other music dramas: the dramatic action of *Die Meistersinger* is set in a *real*—rather than mythological—time and place.

Appia, in his scenario for the work, transposes this attention to realism away from the inanimate elements of the stage design—which, as we recall,

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were so painstakingly researched and detailed in the work's première—to the lighting. Thus the intensity and direction of the stage lighting must be appropriate for the time of day in which the dramatic action takes place, as well as expressing differences between interior and exterior settings. The objects on stage are then to be arranged in such a way so that the shadows they cast in relation to the lighting support the overall impression of real life. In this way, the role Appia assigns to lighting technique for *Die Meistersinger* is as much *realistic* as symbolic.

Although it may seem self-evident today that the lighting should reflect differences between night and day, Appia's appeal to the realistic use of lighting in this work's production is intended specifically as a critique of the conventional practices of his day, wherein the stage would be undifferentially illuminated in full by the footlights. The lighting's realistic portrayal of the differences between indoor and outdoor settings then takes on a symbolic role when understood in terms of the conflict between interior and exterior life which, as noted above, creates the essence of the dramatic action in Appia's interpretation. The double-duty of the lighting as both realistic and symbolic in function is especially cogent in the work's penultimate scene, when the ray of light shining in through the cobbler's door serves as mediator between the interior and exterior setting, as well as private and public life.

Notes on the Translation

Appia's essay concerning *Die Meistersinger* is divided into two sections: one presenting a scenario for the staging, and the other presenting an analysis of the drama's key characters; the two sections are presented here in the same order as they appear in the *Oeuvres complètes* (Appia 1986:249–65), although Appia may have intended to have the character analysis precede the scenario. This means that, when Appia states at the end of the character analysis that “is it now possible to give some detailed examples” (265), he is referring to the section of the essay published at the beginning.

The numbered endnotes are Appia's own, which appear as footnotes in the original published edition. Out of concern not to obscure the reader's attention to Appia's own notes, I have chosen not to present within this translation the large volume of additional endnotes provided by the editor of the *Oeuvres Complètes*; rather, much of the information provided by the latter notes have been integrated within this introduction.

Notes

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1. Marie Bablet-Hahn suggests that Appia originally intended for these two scenarios to be included in *La mise en scène*; their ultimate omission was presumably at the publisher's request (Appia 1986:245–47).

2. Bauer, for example, states that “Appia wasted very little time on it” (1983:184).

3. From Appia, *Die Musik und die Inszenierung*, as reproduced in Beacham (1994:23).

4. As cited in Beacham (1994:11).

5. From Appia, *Theatrical Experiences and Personal Investigations* (1921), as reproduced in Beacham (1994:43).

6. “Pour le drame du poète-musicien le réalisme scénique doit avoir évidemment une portée toute différente puisque la musique crée le milieu et que cette création, qui dure autant que le drame lui-même, anime et justifie aux yeux du public chaque minute du spectacle. Une action dramatique qui a besoins de la musique pour s'exprimer est de telle nature que les notions matérielles nécessaires au drame parlé lui sont superflues. En renonçant aux signes inanimés de la peinture, elle ne sacrifie rien que l'éclairage ne puisse lui remplacer; la réalité “practicable” des objets n'est alors justifiée qu'en tant qu'elle favorise l'éclairage ou que cela entre en rapport direct avec l'acteur.” (Appia 1986:251)

7. From Appia (1962:72); as quoted in Beacham (1994:59).

8. Evidence indicates that he originally intended for this essay to have followed the discussion of *Tristan und Isolde* in the first drafts of his book on staging Wagnerian drama (Appia 1986:470n1), thus ordering his discussions by the chronology of the works.

9. “Les trois actes des Maîtres chanteurs comportent deux décors d'intérieur et deux de plein air, alternant régulièrement les uns avec les autres. L'éclairage aura à marquer ces successives oppositions et la plantation et la peinture lui seront subordonnées.

Le premier intérieur, un bas-côté d'une église de Nuremberg, fait à son tour opposition avec le second intérieur, le petit atelier du savetier Hans Sachs.

Le premier plein air, un carrefour de l'ancienne Nuremberg, en fait de même avec le second plein air, une prairie dégagée aux environs de la ville.

Les quatre tableaux offrent ainsi une disposition favorable à leur effet séparé, et l'on peut s'absorber dans le caractère de chacun d'eux sans faire de tort à ceux qui l'entourent.” (Appia 1986:252)

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The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*

Adolphe Appia (ca. 1892–96); *Translation by Cathy Cox*

This work forms the most violent contrast with [*Tristan und Isolde*]. Whatever the author's dramatic intentions were, here it is evident that *exterior* life plays the principal role on stage, and this is not only through the contents of the poetic text, but also through the extraordinary intensity the music gives to this life. The question, then, is how to communicate through the opera's staging a life analogous to that expressed by the music.

A knowledge of the score—however superficial this knowledge might be—must convince us that, in this drama, the musical expression attains a power to which no spectacle can lay claim.

The interior drama in *Tristan und Isolde* does not pose any limits to the musical expression; so that this expression is entitled to develop itself up to the mere limits of our nervous stamina and one knows of what stamina Wagner had supposed us capable! But the case appears differently in *Die Meistersinger*; and since the music here expresses exterior life, it seems the music would have to hold back the degree of intensity that this life can reach on stage, or at least supply, through the poetic text, the exceptional possibilities for the stage production. Neither of these happens at all: the poetic text comprises various scenes from the public and private life of the mundane middle class, and the music that expresses these episodes, as we well notice, greatly surpasses through its intensity that which any spectacle can suggest.

Wagner pursued an exclusively dramatic goal in this work as he did in his other musical dramas; that is to say that if he had so steadfastly expressed the exterior life through the music, and given to this expression a power out of proportion with the visual performance and design that one could draw from it, it is because he would consider that all of this was indispensable to what he wanted to communicate to us. In other words, the conflict that he had in his heart to present to us was necessarily composed of this entire apparatus.

The performance of this work is difficult to analyze from an emotional standpoint. An awareness of one's impressions would be desirable yet they escape all scrutiny. Then one day, either spontaneously or by the impetus given through a third party, the clear and precise formula will suddenly arrive to satisfy you and to transform the troubled and indefinable joys into a happy sense of security.

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The hero of the drama is the cobbler Hans Sachs. His robust personality is inclined to disappear in the many-colored streams that surround him, and yet, strangely, these same streams seem to sing in evidence of his superiority.

When he is visible on stage, the musical intensity seems more legitimate than in his physical absence. In the same way, the more powerful the music, the larger our feelings of intimacy and respect seem toward Hans Sachs; and that, far from having this music yield to the visual actions on stage, which nevertheless find expression in the music, we are obliged to consider the music as a dignified commentary on Sachs' personal identity.

The expression of the exterior life that surrounds our hero Sachs participates sympathetically in the nature of his character, making us understand that this exterior life is only there with the following aim in mind: that the dramatic action must result from this existing relationship between this exterior life and Sachs. The poetic text tells us when the relationship fails to escape the eternal conflict between a great personality and the egotistical and vulgar preoccupations of those who live in contact with that personality. The equally eternal result of this lies in the hero's utmost resignation and the ever-increasing calm that he acquires in contemplating the self-interested lives of others, while completely renouncing his own desires.

The music, as we know, needs time to develop. Prior to the need to present at length the turbulent life of the Nuremberg residents, Wagner—in order to express his drama—needed to seek recourse in a process that would not encroach on the duration of this life. He endowed his music with a superior power in the formal sense of representation; and as it was impossible to obtain a similar intensity solely through the combination of sounds, he sought recourse for this in his hero. Hans Sachs sees the reality of things with all the intensity that interior silence lends to a contemplative soul. Wagner, the poet, the musician, the creator of the work, could see the residents of Nuremberg only in the mirror of this great soul of a poet. In this way, that is what he goes through as well as what he presents to us in his drama of *Die Meistersinger*.

To arrive at the heart of the question, we need to assume the same scruples in the poet-musician as in the stage director. But if the latter can analyze the score from his point of view because he has it before his eyes in its definitive form, the dramaturgist needs to create spontaneously. I do not, however, mean to say by the preceding considerations that Wagner had made the same reflections, nor that he was positively conscious of this state of things.

However, the score of *Die Meistersinger* is in some ways the vision of Sachs, or, if one prefers, Wagner makes us experience the external life in the

same way that Sachs experiences it. The stage production, then, needs to show us that this life that seems extraordinary to us is nothing but life in its most mundane manifestations. The privilege that we have in grasping the greater meaning through the medium of the music does not imply that the exhibition of this life is transfigured. Much to the contrary, since it is the conflict resulting from the music's higher meaning, grasped by an elite soul and at grips with its temporal manifestations, that makes the object of the drama.

The discord between the musical expression and the visual performance finds itself to be precisely the only tangible form that could take on the dramatic action of *Die Meistersinger*. Even if resolution were possible, it would be necessary to keep the drama from resolving this dissonance: even then, the essence of the drama would not be any more accessible to us; but we have to maintain this essence within the limits wherein the author had found the possibility of his drama, we the audience must experience the profound harmony in the drama.

The stage production of *Die Meistersinger*, however, will be *realistic*. Only, this word must be understood in the sense provided within the drama of a poet-musician. Scenic realism for spoken drama is determined by the text of the play. The director must realize the more or less coincidental places where the action is played out, in seeking to imitate their true-to-life aspect to place them in agreement with the language of the characters in the play. Now, the location in which one finds oneself is only expressed very indirectly by means of speech alone. And in particular, the character of realistic conversation is made up to a great extent such that those who take part in it should take the place of action for granted and only make allusion to it as it pertains to their interest. As the exact ideas on the actors' part are in this way private, the audience falls back on the stage production. The latter can only be made realistic by moving away from paintwork.

In order to make up for the silence of the actors, the stage director is obliged to convey a large number of ideas to the audience by cluttering the sets with practicable objects. This excess of practicability is not motivated by the actor's performance; most of these objects do not enter into contact with him; they are only there to augment the illusion of reality. But as it is deemed necessary for the audience to see every detail of the scenery, a very perceptible part of the lighting is employed to illuminate it. This usually results in a sensation of clutter in discord with the simplicity or insignificance of the text; and the lighting—which is capable of drawing all of the scenic and textual elements into a harmonious tableau—is similarly not free in its activity. Indeed, a more perfectly detailed spectacle may greatly

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exceed the reach of any realistic text and destroy the dramatic effect in preventing sufficient view of the actor's facial features in performance, which is indispensable to the full understanding of the play.

For the drama of the poet-musician, the scenic realism obviously has to have a completely different scope, since the music creates the environment and since this creation, which lasts as long as the drama itself, animates and justifies in the eyes of the audience every minute of the spectacle. A dramatic action that needs music in order to be expressed is of such a nature that the material notions necessary in spoken drama are superfluous to it. By renouncing the inanimate signs of the painted scenery, nothing is sacrificed that lighting cannot replace; the "practicable" reality of the objects are then only justified insofar as they favor the lighting or they enter into a direct relation with the actor. The actor, not being the unique interpreter of the author in the view of the audience, needs to interact with the inanimate tableau and to participate in its material submission vis-à-vis the lighting. The result is that if such a Wagnerian drama calls for a realistic stage production, it is not the tangible reality of things in their chance arrangement that will be of more auxiliary assistance, but only the *impression* of this reality. It is the lighting that gives this impression.

The freedom of the lighting vis-à-vis the actor and the sets, and that of the actor vis-à-vis the audience, permits us to obtain an infinite diversity on the part of realism; also this word no longer has the exclusive and limited significance for the poet-musician's drama that all other dramatic forms inflict on it. Similarly, one can affirm that the stage production of this drama is always realistic.¹

If we said that the staging of *Die Meistersinger* must be realistic, this means that the part of realism must attain its maximum within the *mise-en-scène*. The realism must be characterized such that the persons onstage achieve an exceptional independence *vis-à-vis the audience*, in order to underline the constant opposition between the spectacle and the contemplative soul of Sachs. I say "exceptional"—that is, it must be very easily sensed by the audience. This sensation will be a hallmark for the union that will reconstruct within the spectator's soul the harmony intentionally disturbed by the author.

This independence of the actor gives maximum freedom to the lighting, which reduces the paintwork to its simplest expression.

We now have a solid point of departure and we can enter into the detailed composition of the *mise-en-scène* of this drama, without fear of ever losing our way.

The three acts of *Die Meistersinger* consist of two interior settings and two

open-air settings, alternating regularly from one to the other. The lighting will have to mark these successive oppositions and the sets and the paintwork will be subordinate to it.

The first interior setting, the aisle of a church of Nuremberg, is in turn in opposition to the second interior setting, the small workshop of the cobbler Hans Sachs.

The first open-air setting, a crossroads in old Nuremberg, is similarly in opposition to the second open-air setting, a clearing somewhere near the city.

The four settings offer in this manner an arrangement favorable to their separate effect, and we can absorb ourselves in the character of each of them without doing a disservice to the ones that frame it.

Take the first tableau at the precise moment of the curtain rise. The colossal prelude has just resounded, and it ends with a deafening fortissimo. The empty scene is dark relative to the nave of the church, on which a ray of morning sun crosses, casting upon the faithful assembly and the surrounding walls the vibrant colors of the stained glass windows. The music of the chorale underlines this opposition, and the knight's gesturing attracts the attention to this singular aspect of the set design.

Normally this scene is sacrificed by the stage director: probably because it is very short and because the view of the nave is immediately concealed by the curtains. This is unfortunate, because the poet-musician presents to us there, at the very beginning, the population of Nuremberg in one of the characteristic acts of its life. This first impression has to suddenly stretch the material notions of the spectator and correspond to the sentiment of a grandiose community where the prelude had already led it. It is not the length of a scene that determines its performative importance. Here, nothing justifies the sacrifice of the first scene to the benefit of a stage décor that only plays—as much as it is décor—a very subdued role in the course of the act; and the considerations of symmetry are completely secondary vis-à-vis those of an effect that is of a practical need to the spectator.

The left side of the stage will therefore be very developed in such a way as to provide a considerable performative importance to the view of the nave. In contrast, the right side will be foreshortened in the rear. The door in the background is found there, pushed back to the right, and does not face the audience, which is of no inconvenience and gives on the contrary a particularly realistic life to the scenes that follow.

The crowd passes by, large in number, and exits the radiant light that transfigures it. The conversation of the three people who remain on stage takes on the character of a mysterious consultation in one corner of the shadow in an area remote from the vast, brilliantly illuminated nave. The

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stage remains fixed up until the moment where David closes the curtain; in so doing, he diminishes the visual field of the stage and suddenly gives an air of intimacy to the aisle that represents the scene—thereby signaling to the audience that the action is about to become more focused and precise.

The morning sun is supposed to change direction little by little—in such a way that the stained-glass window to the right, that was giving only a pale and cold light, starts to light up more directly.

At the end of the first scene, while the three voices are united in a short trio, a first ray of the sun starts to hit this stained-glass window and cuts diagonally across the stage behind the actors.

The large number of practicable objects that are going to fill the stage—in reducing the painted sets—highly favor the lighting, which permits the actors to fully interact with the inanimate tableau. We have seen [in my previous essays], that this is one of the essential conditions of the *mis-en-scène* for this drama.

The following scenes up to the end of the act will possess *strictly* the private character of a spectacle that the audience attends by chance—and which does not necessarily take into consideration the demands from this audience's viewpoint.²

The ray of sunlight becomes fuller; it first falls on the back part of the stage, then advances imperceptibly in the following manner: from the scene among the masters to the presentation of Walther, it lights up the middle of the stage; from there to the interruption of Walther's song, it hits more specifically the left portion of the front stage; from there to the end of the act, the light continually spreads further in leaving only the third of the stage on the right side in a relative shadow. It goes without saying that the diffuse light will augment with the path of the ray and diminish the latter's exclusive brightness.

The trajectory of the light gives each episode its distinctive character. Before the entrance of the masters, the scene presents only the preparations for an impending spectacle: the twilight is thus justified in preparing—by itself, in a brilliant effect—for the gathering that is going to follow. The instructions that David, Sachs' apprentice, gives to Walther will lose their false performative appearances that the foreground lit up by the footlights forcibly gives to them, and will gain in musical-poetic intensity. The mastersingers, before each one takes his place, form into the various groups characteristic of the start of every meeting among these men; the lighting in this moment will be of a nature to give them a very curious realistic life. Beckmesser, the brilliant and awkward *plumassier* [feather specialist], will circumvent the light in the middle of the stage to the shadow in the foreground and vice-versa, always halting in the shadow for his personal asides;

whereas Walther, his rival, will be in the sunlight. On Walther's return, the sun hits most directly only on the young knight who comes to present himself to the assembled guild. Beckmesser, in rising to take up his functions as marker, will leave the shadow in order to enter into the light. The same goes for Kothner, the mastersinger responsible for informing the new candidate regarding the laws of the tablature. And Walther will be the only one touched by the radiant spring sun during his contest song. His failure causes a lot of confusion among the assembly; thus, the lighting, in spreading, will augment the general movement. Finally, the curtain will fall on the more or less empty stage overrun by the sun.

It will be easy to regulate the detail of the staging if one scrupulously observes here the private character of the spectator and his accord with the lighting.

As the actors are the essential part of the staging of *Die Meistersinger*, it is important, in order to give some example of the detail, to determine with precision the distinctive traits of each of the characters. But it is first necessary to prepare a plan for them on the stage for the entire duration of their role. We will thus first achieve a properly stated set-design analysis.

The short prelude of Act II continues the impression of community that was brilliantly communicated to the audience in the preceding act, only the musical impression no longer simultaneously embraces the thousand faces of life; the current we feel ourselves swept along is no longer a powerful and nearly universal one. The scene presents to us the respective residence of the characters, and the action—in agreement with the spectacle—makes us participate in the distinct game of each character's personal interests. In Act I, the place and action itself permitted a grandiose unity; the people there were gathered in a common goal limited by narrow conventions, and it was precisely the community of this goal and its conventions that placed the personal interests of those who took part into conflict. In the present act, it is necessary to study further the principle of unity, because the streets of Nuremberg and the residents who pass by, entering and exiting their dwellings, do not have a real *performative* unity if the musical poetry divides its expression—that is, if it does not express all of the spectacle simultaneously, but rather each episode in particular.

Now, it is incontestable that the nocturnal din that ends the act draws its effect to a large extent from the nearly sudden concentration of all the contradictory interests onto one spot: without the preceding divisions, this scene would have no depth and the first scene of the next act would have no intensity. For it is not necessary for Hans Sachs to be obliged afterwards (in Act III) to comment to us about the spectacle; we need to have experienced it in the same way as he did and to consider the poet-philosopher our inter-

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preter and not our initiator concerning the consequences of the events of the waking hours.³ We need to experience in a tangible way that the social conventions imposed on the individuals are what makes the instincts of each one of them *personal*, and that—beyond these conventions—egoism and brutality make up the core of these individuals in equal mass and propel them by the same interests and intentions. The splintering is indeed a favorable condition for the effect that must produce this second act and the staging needs to avoid anything that can water down this effect vis-à-vis the audience.

The most disjointed action can acquire a performative unity if the actors address themselves to the audience: the spectator senses, then, that by his sole presence he provides to each of them a reason to exist since they all treat him like a confidant; and the actor knows that his role cannot be superfluous or inconsequential since he only has to address himself to the spectator in order to justify his presence on stage. This fact is a task of their mutual existence especially in light-hearted plays, vaudevilles and such. If, in contrast to this, the author has the intention to present to us a succession of more or less detached episodes with the goal to merely demonstrate to us afterwards—and through a final scene—the unity of all of these diverse manifestations of life, the actor would then never be able to allow himself the expectation that the effect of this last scene would revive the intentionally broken threads for the audience. In the drama of Act I, the actor who wanted to address himself to the audience performed a redundant act, because the music forbade him a function that it wants to fill alone.⁴ But if this dramatic form does not permit an actor to directly confide in the audience, there nevertheless exist many degrees of independence in the relations between the stage and the auditorium.

We have seen that the maximum degree of independence must be reached for *Die Meistersinger*. In the preceding act this independence could hardly express itself except in the characters' play *among themselves*, because where they were gathered was not the kind of place that would be of assistance to them in this. In Act II, on the contrary, the actor determines the inanimate tableau in a somewhat negative sense because the nature of his role is to let himself be determined by the place through which he passes. There is indeed reciprocal action between the actor and the set: the actor will profit from all the advantages that the set can offer him, in order to give independence to each of the scenes in which he takes part; and the set, by the sole fact that it imposes on the actor a special agency, will provide the desirable independence vis-à-vis the audience.

In these conditions, one may assume—it seems—that the performative conception played a suggestive role with the author during the musical-

poetic composition, because how could the décor establish the actor without this conception since the actor is subordinate to the music?

Wagner, in effect, placed this act in a location that leaves the stage director with no kind of alternative, and he firmly dictated the arrangement of the stage décor through the succession of episodes. Only the stage design and, more particularly, the practicable scenery alone are found to be fixed in this way. The latter is, as we know, the material point of contact between the actor and the inanimate tableau; the practicable scenery is what determines the proportions of the two other factors, the painting and the lighting.⁵ In definitively fixing the way the décor is set up, the author fixed the painting and the lighting in the same way and pulls all the visual elements of the show into a determined state.

Wagner had nothing but an exclusively dramatic intention for this act, as he did everywhere else. If he found a good location to place his characters, but this location was of such a nature that it obliged him to determine the stage design in an absolute sense, this was in some way despite himself. As he did not go back to reflect on the performance hierarchy once he had determined the setting, he didn't necessarily watch out for the consequences that such a tableau imposed on him; and the constraint that the place of action exercised on the characters had only a dramatic signification for him. As a result, the stage director is doomed to a performative conception that, without doing complete violence to the musical-poetic expression, doesn't play a *realistically* suggestive role for this expression. The arrangement adopted by Wagner is without doubt more ingenious, and the dramatic course of action that he drew from it is well made for the purpose of charming us. Yet, on more than one page, we are forced to suffer the lack of balance between the imposed form of the spectacle and the musical-poetic form. It is this impression, made all the worse in that it initially seems inexplicable, that needs to be dispelled as much as possible in our task.

Current stage directors are strongly hindered by the construction of this tableau in the way that it breaks with the ordinary decorative traditions. They do not understand that the painting and lighting naturally result from the imposed set design, and they believe they are able to keep the former two factors designated in the role that the vertical cloths of the stage wings assign to them. For example: they will *paint* on the wall of Sachs' house (an entirely practicable structure) the elder-tree that shades the cobbler's door. Or they will make the moon rise, shimmering, against the back cloth of the scene, and—without taking into account the effect that its light must produce within the entirely practicable décor—they will illuminate at the same time the cloths that face the audience, using the “nocturnal” lenses of the footlights. With much attention to realism, they will pro-

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vide medieval lanterns to the citizens who look out of the windows, but they will destroy the effect of the painting and lanterns by using the foot-lights to excessively illuminate a scene that is meant to be tumultuous—so the neighbors nearest to the scene are not supposed to be able to make out clearly what's going on—while the most distant spectator in the audience has no need of a lantern in order to see them in detail.

To add to the inevitable disagreement between the imposed performative form and the musical-poetic expression, however, a new dissonance arrives which results from that which is reciprocally falsified in the very same principle by this décor's set up on the one hand, and its painting and its lighting on the other.

The first thing to do then, prior to any design, will be to satisfy the pragmatic demands of the dramaturgy, that is to say, to set up the décor with the desirable practicability and to animate it through the characters. Then the stage will be lit as indicated by the set design. A stage designer needs to possess sufficient craft in order to then create the paintwork and complete the tableau.

We will see in [my essay, "The Staging of Wagnerian Drama"], that one must proceed in this way toward the future for the stage production of a Wagnerian drama; because this work of art would not know how to put a stop to any performative convention and that in this way the stage designer will never be able to acquire the necessary experience in order to paint his décor *a priori*. The current decorative principle [of mixing practicable structures with painted flats] will nevertheless be a great help to him in order to make him anticipate in the material arrangement what the fictive perspective of the painting could have provided.

The stage director for Act II of *Die Meistersinger*— possessing a tableau imposed on him by both the author and the laws of decorative hierarchy— will be able to measure the reciprocal influence between the actor and the décor in the aim of placing each scene in its characteristic light, and to prepare the best possible performative effect to the poetic-musical form.

The final scene will permit him to then cast the entire tableau into a united whole that leaves the spectator with a perfectly harmonious impression.

This last scene, however, has not only the dramatic significance that we have indicated above, but also the mission to reconcile with great power the musical-poetic elements with the somewhat heterogeneous performative ones that make up the act.

If we insisted on the particular case that presents this décor, it is because it seems appropriate to us to comment usefully on the theoretic principles of the preceding chapters [from "The Staging of Wagnerian Dramas"].

There is without doubt a lot to say on this subject before launching straight into the concrete stage direction of this act, but we need to restrict ourselves here in order to draw from it only the characteristic trait.

After these two acts, the spectator finds himself in a particular mood: the music, wholly occupying the spectator in drawing his attention to the different scenes presented to him on stage, carried him in along within an interior vibration that was highly superior to what an analogous spectacle would be able to provoke in him if it were left to its own resources. The feeling is greater and of higher quality. The revealing scope of the music provides him with a new depth through the nature of the spectacle. But otherwise the sound of the symphonic stream does not permit the intelligible expression to neutralize its obsessive charm, and it is *in the music* that the spectator experiences the need to gather his thoughts. The all-powerful genius that imposes so despotically on us its manners of feeling cannot leave us in failure; if it pushed the refreshing exercise almost to orgy, it is without doubt in order to better wound us later.

The prelude to Act III arrives in response to this desire. Then the curtain is drawn back with respect, in order to show us how our faith is justified. The handsome figure of Hans Sachs illuminated by the morning sun suddenly embodies the preceding thousand voices; in the hands of such an interpreter, we recover our once-more vibrant soul, and can indulge in the most intimate emotion that exists.

Such is the magic of the music!

The warmth that Tristan inspires in us on his bed of suffering is only of the most natural sort; because if a poet possesses the means to express the interior life of his hero, our emotion can only be augmented by the strength of this expression. For *Die Meistersinger*, the emotion seems to be drawn practically from a miracle; we participate not only in the passions and sufferings of the hero, but in his actual soul. It doesn't get any more beautiful than this. Tears, as they say, result from the pity that a person experiences for his own self; the personal identity of Hans Sachs provides us with the highest emotion so that we feel ennobled.

It is evident that, during the chords that accompany the curtain-rise of Act III, the scene needs only to present Sachs, and the décor favors this focus, because the chattering of David, the young cobbler's apprentice, serves only to augment the profound solitude of the poet.

With the goal among the diverse entrances that follow being to handle each of their distinctive characters with care, it is necessary for the spectator to be filled with the calm intimacy of the locale. The reserved attitude of the knight Walther, the extravagant interruption of Beckmesser, the appear-

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ance of Eva—who is without doubt always welcome in the modest cobbler's studio and further profits from the situation by playing the difficult and spoiled child—all this needs to touch us directly through the contact of these persons with Sachs' material surroundings. Up until the moment when the noisy life from outside irrevocably invades the scene, it is Sachs himself who transfigures the spectacle through the omnipotence of renunciation.

How can the intimacy of the locale be expressed in the staging with enough intensity to make it into something sacred in the eyes of the audience?

Many things are converging here. First, Sachs' comportment up until Walther's entrance, placed in high relief by the lighting and kept in isolation by the closed door to the street. Then that of the knight, equally favored by the lighting. The *spectacle* alone needs to have already ennobled the locale to such a degree that it is painful to see the cumbersome personality of Beckmesser enter with ease.

With Beckmesser, the scene's indifferent attitude toward the street is interrupted: the upper shutter on the door remains open, and it would make for a good effect to have some residents pass by outside. Our interests are focused on Sachs, and we look to him to impose ever more strongly a superior form on the spectacle; for when all is said and done, the spectacle is the work of his renunciation.

For this last scene, the light comes to subtly prove the creative power of the poet's soul, in casting through the open door a ray of light on which each person stands out against an expressive silhouette. This same ray of light renders the flats up front obscure and seems to be committed to reaching the open air: the exit into public life is expressed in this way with precision and impartiality. The small interior becomes deserted and David, in ostensibly closing the shutters, guarantees the inviolability of this locale that has become dear to us.

The essential thing, then, is not to draw the spectator's attention onto anything superfluous; that is, nothing in the entire tableau should take on an independent, performative importance. Thus, the nature of the objects is secondary, because—upon reflection—it signifies what needs to be expressed for the spontaneous impression. It is not necessary to portray realistically a cobbler's material domain for us to give expression to Sachs' influence over all that surrounds him. The lighting alone is capable of doing this because only it can effectively radiate a personality throughout space.

The personality of our hero must spread in things, rather than the things standing in relation to the personality. In a spoken drama there would be without doubt the possibility of *reciprocal* action between the actor and the décor because this dramatic form is only accessible to ideas that would dic-

tate such a reciprocity. For the particular case that occupies us, the poet-musician infinitely exceeds these ideas and, if we want to place some agreement between that which the poet-musician communicates to us and that which the scene presents to us, it is indispensable to sacrifice all the decorative elements that would attract our attention without passing through the actor.

The lighting is thus no longer—as in the first act—the only auxiliary necessary to the actor to assure him of the highest possible degree of independence and expression; but it needs to come once more to the aide of the set design and practicable objects, for without proper lighting, these would be incapable of supplying the kind of expression that this tableau demands of it.

Whatever the composition of this décor may be, it needs to allow for a maximum of realism in lighting design. This realism will contribute toward a considerable shadow that will spread throughout those parts of the stage where the illuminating light cannot reach, and this shadow will favor a meticulous arrangement of practicable objects, keeping our goal in mind; the result will be that nothing will be able to be ordered on stage without the support of the characters.

The next tableau is not—as is usually expected—a vulgar opera décor, with the inevitable banners, open space for dancing, the raised seats for the privileged, etc., all of which in the end constitute the most common of common places in our lyric scenes.

On exiting Hans Sachs' studio, we do not fall into comic-opera. The place where the prophetic chorale of the great Nuremberg poet-musician will soon resound, where the most penetrating lyricism will carry the whole population along in its flow, where all those who have a voice will soon proclaim the high purpose of music with such marvelous tones that tears of enthusiasm will stream from our eyes—this place wouldn't know how to be that site where the deplorable abuses of this same music has flaunted itself for over a century!

Not that, in being this kind of location, it is in any way opposed to the most elevated intentions, but it is discredited by a use that has been ridiculous for an overly long period of time such that it is difficult for us to overcome this memory.

By “opera décor” one means an opulent staging that has no other goal than opulence itself, and is intended for characters whose intentions aren't settled either; where the result is a character flaw that has nearly become a synonym of its own name. It is our task for the final set in *Die Meistersinger*, then, to combat this flaw.

In other words, it is necessary to seek to give *character* to this tableau by

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every possible means.

The action authorizes the complete deployment of all the director's resources, and the dramatic intention itself will not be fully realized unless one gives the audience the impression of a grandiose spectacle both through its nature and through the scenic effort that it represents.

From the start we are struck by a favorable circumstance: the dramatic focus—always imminent in Wagner and often highly awkward in a tableau hardly made for placing it in relief—finds itself here materially sustained by the spectacle. The poet-musician is raised above the individual drama of his characters, and if he wants to focus the contents of his expression, he will only be able to do this by relating a common sentiment, not only to the population on stage, but also to the audience in the hall. This fact has a great performative importance, because in this way the stage production doesn't risk being indifferent to the dramatic expression and the entire focus will be able to directly distinguish itself through the crowd that fills the décor. If this crowd does not show an interest obvious enough for the events in which they take part, the spectator will suffer an intolerable impatience and the music will cast over the spectacle an irreparable ridiculousness.

One circumstance that it would be wrong to forget is that *Die Meistersinger* is very long in duration, that the expression doesn't offer as much variety as in other dramas of the same dimension, and that in this way the audience—having arrived at this last tableau—is also not its own master as at the beginning: the audience then cannot react against the flaws of the spectacle. The audience's growing passiveness makes it ever more sensitive to these flaws, and the distance between that which it hears and that which it sees destroys the enjoyment of either one.

Now, a commonly felt enthusiasm is the sentiment that remains in existence the longest, that to which one never resorts without success; but abstraction has no quality that can strike this chord; the lawmakers know this well. On stage, abstraction can take a kind of material form. For example: a Nuremberg resident whose costume is rigorously and meticulously historic, and which is displayed by the light of the flood lamps, constitutes an abstraction from a performative point of view; an enthusiastic crowd that dons handkerchiefs and hats, but does not utter a sound, is also an abstraction: it *signifies* an enthusiastic crowd, but it *is not one*. This same crowd that in cheering a well-loved poet does not make a step toward him is the height of abstraction. The decorative abstractions that lay the foundation of the paintwork are already well known to us. If we indeed want to strike a chord of shared enthusiasm with the audience, it will be necessary to endow the spectacle with a sufficiently realistic life in order to overcome the fatigue of a long audition and the abnormal position of a passive spec-

tator.

The character of this tableau will not be—like certain false artists would desire—in the research of a local medieval color; the coronation of the drama of *Die Meistersinger* should not pleasantly tickle the instincts of a collector, or recall the engravings “of the time”; Nuremberg and the sixteenth century are nothing but pretexts. It is pure and simple humanity that is at work here; that for which the fashion and costumes are a completely exterior coating, but whose soul is our own. Why do we need to lay stress on passing appearances when the music expresses to us the perfect uniformity of the desires and emotions? This uniformity expresses itself visually through the eternal magic of the *lighting*.

The same sun that shone on us when we were climbing the hill where the theater of Bayreuth rises, that had cast a powerful shadow on the building on the surrounding fields, that radiated indifferently over the cosmopolitan crowd and the peasant at his plough, it is this sun that long ago had spread its rays over the Nuremberg population, eager like us to forget existence through a divine fiction, and it is the sun that spreads again and always over all humanity. To close one’s eyes to the gentle light—this means the same in every language: to die. Now, this light can only be perceptible to us through shadow, its indispensable complement; it is the quality of the shadow that expresses the quality of the light, because light alone has no existence for us. In order to avoid scenic abstraction, it is then necessary to make the light *perceptible*; that is, to express its quality through the shadows that it will supply. In midday, and in open air, the light comes to us from above; and we only know that it comes from that direction through the quality of the shadows that it then casts on the ground and on objects. These shadows are what will give the final tableau of *Die Meistersinger* a realistic air and the character of simple humanity that—together with the musical expression—will be able to strike the chord of shared enthusiasm with the audience.

Do I need to say that this tableau sets a pretext for me here for affirming one of the truths, one of the fundamental axioms of staging the Wagnerian drama? We will return in the next section [in “The Staging of Wagnerian Drama”] to the lighting’s role in realizing in the visual realm that which the music so supremely demonstrates to us: knowledge of the eternal uniformity of the human soul across fleeting appearances. For the moment it is important to make the reader fully comprehend why this tableau can be considered as particularly eloquent on this subject: and this is very difficult, because the pragmatic realization would be the only measure of proving my point.

If in the more or less “interior” scenes and those of restrained performance the quality of the shadows (that is, of the light) can seem a perfectly

justified source of expression for those present whose eyes are distorted by our modern spectacles, this is perhaps not the case when the scene must be filled with a population in festive attire. The individual expression of attitudes, if well placed in relief by the shadow, seems superfluous when it is a question of a hundred individuals, as is the way in which this crowd is indifferently illuminated so long as it is sufficiently well illuminated.

One such manner of seeing is born from abstract *reflection*, and not from direct and tangible contemplation, that is, from *artistic* vision. In the drama of the poet-musician, simply intelligible reflection has little value to the director, because the music belongs to a world superior to this reflection. I will explain myself with an example: If one wants to set on stage the first section of the Wallenstein trilogy (by Schiller), *Wallenstein's Camp*, it is necessary to start from more than the contents of the text to compose the place of action and the action itself; the form of this text will remain foreign to the spectacle. Those who have seen this poem performed by the Meiningen troupe undoubtedly remember what curious performative perfection the stage director had achieved, and how the text seemed out of place with a similarly researched spectacle. Schiller did not want to *express* the singular life of Wallenstein's camp, and if he would have wanted it that way, the means in which it was arranged would not have permitted him to. He is only able to signify to us through the individual conversations the cosmopolitan state of the army and the soldiers' more or less affection for their general. It is only through a thousand touches and retouches that he arrives at interesting us in the spectacle, and the curtain closes before our attention has really been captivated; that which appeared remains a form of prologue.

If the stage director imposes on our eyes from the beginning—and in one fell swoop—that which the poet takes the entire duration of the play (*Wallenstein's Camp*) to communicate to us, the text will seem to us to be dreadfully slow-paced and out of proportion with the performative effect of the tableau; the poetic subtleties will be lost in this, because we will only be able to think of this text in terms of the various labels affixed to the details of the spectacle; and finally our interest for either the text or the spectacle will be destroyed by the appearance of a mahout [elephant-driver] which the stage director added to the dramaturgy.

The author of *Wallenstein* entitled his trilogy *Bühnendichtung*—and not without reason—although carried by his subject he is unable to defend arriving at simple tragedy. Stage production is, we have seen, “the process by which we seek to realize visually some dramatic conception or another.” In order to realize a conception such as *Wallenstein's Camp*, it is necessary to seek agreement in the spectacle between the form and the poetic content; and, as the poem cannot supply us with anything precise—much less the

formula—in this regard, it is necessary for us to use reflection in order to create with its support an “intelligible” stage production that corresponds *if possible* to the text’s meaning and intelligible form. Reflection plays a role here beyond the poet, then, and the stage production doesn’t result directly from the written play.

For a poet-musician’s drama, we are obliged to take as an example one of Richard Wagner’s dramas and, as we know, the stage direction of these dramas is fixed in the score, even though their author had not rigorously taken this into account. The reflection that we are forced to employ in order to restore the harmony neglected by the author makes our efforts without doubt relatively artificial; but nevertheless this reflection doesn’t create anything that is *outside* of the drama for the stage production. We do not make use of it in order to determine the staging (as we are obliged to do for Schiller), but only in order to capture with precision the author’s conception and to seek its agreement in the form that the poet-musician gives us. Now, this form transports itself on the stage by means of the music, and this transposition is imposed on us by the work itself. We do not construct through our reflection, then, a harmony that does not already exist, but we reconstruct that which the dramatic intensity particular to Richard Wagner tends to conceal from our gaze.

Knowing the highly complex structure of a Wagnerian drama, which fixes the hierarchy of the means of expression whose unity make up this work of art, we must no longer call on anything—in the presence of a score by Wagner—but the artistic vision that this score provokes in us, and our reflection gives us nothing more than the passive service that we demand of it in order to solve an algebraic problem where, as we know, the mathematician invents nothing, but seeks something that is tacitly contained in the problem, and finds it.

The Characters of *Die Meistersinger*

To judge the characters of this drama equitably from the performative point of view, it is necessary to make two divisions. The first division will consist only of Hans Sachs; the second all the other characters.

Eva, the daughter of the rich goldsmith Veit Pogner, and David, the apprentice of the cobbler-poet, are the only ones among the characters who, being under the direct influence of Sachs, can give precious information to us about the great personality. Eva said this herself to Sachs, in Act III [scene 4]: “Durch dich gewann ich . . .”, and from the first act onward we felt the richness of this child’s soul in the enthusiasm that it inspired in the knight Walther’s beautiful turn of phrase, and his analogy between David and the

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old Nuremberg master, Dürer. But Sachs did not exercise restraint; he let his young female friend blossom freely, and limited himself to enriching his soul with all the infinite goods that a great artist spreads around him. Hence the particular charm of this feminine apparition—who, we feel, can let her lively nature overflow without impoverishing by this spontaneity the contents of her expression.

The scene in the second act between Eva and Sachs gives us the exquisite pleasure of practically taking part in the union of these two personalities: the poet makes himself a poet once more for leaning toward the young girl, and without doubt she finds it completely natural that her friend matches his instrument with hers. But, however, how easy it is for Sachs to produce the least amount of dissonance! And if he has no choice, with how much grace he does it!

David, the intelligent young apprentice, is treated more harshly by the cobbler. He is not a genius; the foremost mastersinger is unable to communicate his art to him except in an aphoristic form, and the young gentleman passes it on in just the same way to those whom he wants to instruct. In the first act, if he presents to us the doctrine of the mastersingers with a faithful memory—which we welcome him to do—and a charming display that he must have drawn from Sachs; he captivates us even more through his robust good humor that makes him the dignified student of his master. This good humor, a bit rugged and lively, joined with the profound respect that the great poet inspires in him, gives a highly distinctive fullness to the character of David, the cobbler's apprentice.⁶

Beckmesser, the public scribe, is the uncontested mastersinger whose profession already places his theoretic skill beyond question among his colleagues, and one of the personalities for whom one cannot deny a certain genius, but whose character alone is a work of genius. His personal impressions are much too livid and constant to allow him the time to develop anything other than his extreme susceptibility. A nature as contemplative as that of Sachs could not but arouse his jealousy through the calm that characterizes it—a calm that he, Beckmesser, so greatly lacks. The company of the poet is nevertheless indispensable to him; he finds there the stimulation that he needs in order to maintain his irritability, his bitterness, his sarcasm, and his spirit of contradiction; all of the sensations that, in the end, make him alive. Neither can he conceal the fact that he supplies Sachs with a spectacle that the latter far from despises. But that he chose precisely the foremost of the Nuremberg masters as spectator already pays great honor to Beckmesser and contributes not a little to the interest he inspires in us. His role is, then, not comic in the exclusive sense of the word.

The baker Kothner is the mastersinger entrusted with the expression of

the indispensable conventional statutes of the whole association. The masters believed to have locked in these conventions precisely the development of their art, and have undoubtedly done so with the very respectable desire to protect its integrity. The role of Kothner acquires by this fact a solemnity that the music endows with classic accents and high contrast. In the presence of the knight Walther, Kothner represents the impassable obstacle; the powerful caliber of his song must then be embodied in an ample physique, perfectly mastered with his comportment and radiating health. The pernicky scruples of the masters vis-à-vis the new candidate will be seen in this way nearly to be justified in our eyes by their interpreter; and Veit Pogner, the goldsmith, whose fortune and influence make the nature more delicate, will gain through contact with the jovial and conscientious baker a proper foil to impress them both.

The entire lyrical element of the drama rests on Walther; only this lyricism is so enmeshed with the symphonic framework that, long before it is communicated to us by the young knight, we are in some way saturated by it, and the bright tenor does not seem to us as anything more than one of the general symphonic voices, the same as any bird in the forest. It is not, then, in musical form that Walther will be able to find the character of his role. He is given an insipid guitar in every scene because it is believed that he must embody the lyrical musical form; the music is now merely a way to express the disposition of the soul that is named lyric, but the music is not lyricism. If it is in Walther's nature to have this disposition, he will voluntarily give lyrical form to his expressions, and that is all—but his nature will remain no less that of a knight in the flesh. When he is solemnly asked which master trained him in the art of song, it is not an instrument that he tunes in response; he searches in his memory, with all the custom of a cultivated spirit, who may well have initiated it in the mysteries of expression; from there, stimulated by the new questions, he is stirred into remembrance of the ardent joys of his personal life, and effectively finishes through the lyric expansion that comes so naturally to him.

The vulgar spirits are what always translate through their conduct the movements of their soul and thereby impose a cumbersome and disagreeable manner on those who surround them. The situation in which Walther finds himself from the beginning of Act I well justifies a great intensity of expression, but not a perpetual emphasis in attitude. For example: his request to Pogner, before the meeting of the masters, shows us to what marvelous life the poet-musician can reach through the sole musical vibration of ambient air; but this vibration must not revolve around the person of Walther—the young knight does nothing but participate like the rest of the spectacle, and when he withdraws, the symphonic flow does not continue

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to spread out any less. One of the charms of lyric expression in the drama is the result that comes from the extremely advantageous way the expression reveals to us the essence of a person. The more this expression concentrates itself on an individual, the more temperate this person will be in his performance, because the inner treasure that assumes a lyric soul is enough to replace in its possessor that which others must gain through the continual activity of their presence. The role of Walther is completely indicated through this.

We have seen that the personality of Hans Sachs is what endows the musical expression with an exceptional and disproportionate power to that of the spectacle. His presence on stage must then, it seems, have a completely particular *performative* importance. However, he has nothing to do with it. In Act I, Sachs does not touch the action except when through his silence he would risk being considered as consenting to that which was just said, and he exercises no influence except that of his free opinion. Through his monologue in Act II, he communicates no more than his impressions and his personal judgment without making us suspect that he could have any effect on the course of events. He acts in the same way with Eva, but under a new and titillating form. Finally, when he notices that it is time to seize the moment, his intervention takes the same character as the objections with which he opposed his colleagues in Act I; only these objections cannot be expressed directly through words and Sachs makes use of the first available means to show that he is not in agreement. In his respect for the freedom of others, he lets things go as far as possible without imminent risk to those he loves; then, his discretion not being recognized, he decides to act.

When a man of this caliber directly and voluntarily touches the lives of others, the heavy responsibility that he takes upon himself does not come without suffering. We will then be entitled to wait in the following act for Sachs to confide in us his projects regarding Eva and Walther. The old sun, always new, rising in the morning of a festival day, does not however suggest anything to the great poet except the patterns of contemplation: it is foolish illusion that seems to traitorously direct the actions of men, even in a town as richly endowed as Nuremberg; or perhaps the commotion of the day before; . . . who then could have provoked such a brawl?! . . . Hans Sachs? He was only there as an instrument. Nocturnal moths, intoxicated by the perfume of flowers, needed to lend their powerful support, because the poor cobbler, who is he to act on the events . . . !

But the morning sunshine returns more penetrating: and the sun must not slumber without Sachs having justified the responsibility that he had taken; without him having joyously committed the sacrifice of his bliss. What

will he do? Through what decisive action is he going to quell the menacing conflict?

He doesn't know himself. This foolish illusion that carries human life in its streams cannot be stopped, and even less can it be dried at the source; but it can perhaps be "directed" and can serve in its running to reach "a higher goal." This is what Hans Sachs is going to try to do. And the rest of the drama shows us how, with delicate consideration to this same folly, he grabs hold of its weak points.

Finally, at the decisive moment, the thousand voices of the people are going to strengthen the soul of the poet; the love from all of them will open a new horizon to him: that which he *sees*, then, he is unable to communicate; but it is with a perfect serenity that he makes the last service within his power to the noble cause—which his friend Eva Pogner personifies for us.

Without wanting to raise the issue here of the superior nature this manner of behavior has from the purely human perspective, let's try to infer its performative consequences by opposing Sachs to the characters we already know.

In Act I, his arrival at the last minute, noted by Beckmesser as something to which the poet is accustomed, lets it be assumed that Sachs ordinarily avoids occasions of useless gossip. A lot of things have already passed by on stage since the curtain rise and the entrance of the cobbler does nothing to change the course of the spectacle. It is not he who speaks in order to interrupt the order of the day; it is not he who introduces Walther; and when he intervenes in favor of the young man, from the start he makes reference only to his song. The "personality" of which he is later guilty in front of Beckmesser thus shows us the poet's characteristic trait in his relations with his fellow man—a trait that is asserted even further in the following acts: Sachs likes to tear up wittily the lightweight tissue of concealment that hides people's true thoughts; and, what is even more characteristic, he firmly believes that this should never do injury to any cause.

This taste in humor is completely necessary to a contemplative stance; in it, the poet-philosopher seeks some sort of proof of that which he already knows through instinct and silence; and he must procure a certain self-confidence in this experience never being wrong. Sachs' attitude will thus be calm, discrete, self-assured; in private conversation he will never stand in the way of any expansion, letting through the most extravagant things like a man who knows their price; he will have a well-opened eye, paying attention to those whom he addresses, blending with the spectacle in order not to hamper its course—but marking with his accent, when he speaks, that none of his personal interests are ever at play.

Acts II and III justify this conception perfectly, and it is without doubt

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necessary for the continuity from scene to scene. If there is an appearance of personal susceptibility in the dialogue between Sachs and Eva, it is because the cobbler cannot otherwise provoke the sparkle that must reveal to him the feelings of the young girl; and no onlooker is there in the room to misunderstand.

We know the *dramatic* role of Hans Sachs who, scattered throughout the entire score, lifts the work much higher than the spectacle. His *performative* value, on the other hand, is a particular one in that it is much more concerned with that of other people than its own. The contemplative tendency and the characteristic trait that we have discussed—and that is a natural consequence of this tendency—make the poet-philosopher like a reflecting mirror that brilliantly clarifies the characters and, guided by a sure hand, places each one in the appropriate day to make contrasts out of them.⁷ This is why he forms in himself alone one division that is in opposition to all the other roles of the play. But does Sachs, himself, have no one to push him to uncover himself to us with the same ingenuity as those around him? No; on stage there is nobody worthy of this; and that is why the music must take up the charge.

The performer of this role will then look to make his isolation perceptible to the public. The realistic life of his entourage will come to his aid for this. If we feel it to be evident that Sachs augments the contrast of his neighbor without anyone being capable of doing it better for him, we will *understand* the music of *Die Meistersinger*.

The two divisions of the characters happen in this way to realize scenically the musical form adopted by the author.

Given that the action's various connections and the characteristics of the most important characters are firmly set, it is now possible to give some detailed examples—which must be understood keeping in mind that the characters are what comprise the essential part of the staging in this drama.

Notes

* The original French text, "Les maîtres chanteurs de Nuremberg" was published in Adolphe Appia's *Oeuvre complètes*, Vol. II: 1895–1905, edited by M. L. Bablet-Hahn under the auspices of the Société suisse du théâtre (Bonstetten: L'Âge d'Homme, 1986:249–65). This translation is printed here with the generous permission of the Société suisse du théâtre/Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Theaterkultur.

1. It would have been more precise to say *impressionistic*, if this word hadn't taken on a particular significance that has no place here.
2. The choir of the apprentices, notably, has to be executed openly and free of care about their sound.
3. If not, what good is it to waste then in such a princely fashion the most subtle musical

resources? A most celebrated music critic accused Wagner of having spent so many resources for Act II of the *Mastersingers* that he could no longer stay for that person who would want to express on stage a serious political revolution . . . Evidently, if this same famous critic had been able to experience at that most insignificant moment something of the life that indicates a cerebral organism such as that of Richard Wagner, he would have believed that one could not go further in the ardent power of the inner vision.

4. Such as the bad impression that singers make in Wagnerian drama when they address their role to us in the same way as they are obliged to do in opera.

5. For example, in the third act of *Tristan*, the lighting dictated all of the tableau because the role of the actor permitted the practicable scenery to give the lighting this importance. If it had not been in this way, the superior considerations that decided the role of the light would have had to give precedence to the formal conditions of performative means.

6. The interpreter of this character, in the 1888 performance at Bayreuth, seemed to have understood this characteristic fullness. It is regrettable that this role is usually perfectly misconstrued just as that of Beckmesser.

7. In a different sense, the dramatic role of Sachs, that is the musical intensity of the score, performs the same service to the ensemble of the spectacle.