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The recreation of the concept of communal self-consciousness based on Wagner's music-drama

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ABSTRACT

From ancient times until today, enhancing consciousness in the public has been one of the most fundamental goals in tragedies. Throughout history, artists have tried to make ways through tragedy to be able to represent their viewpoints concerning art and politics. In the nineteenth century, Richard Wagner, years after the extinction of the Greek tragedy, found out that the path of enhancing self-consciousness in society lies only through tragedy. The creation a new location (Bayreuth) along with a complex of arts (Total artwork – Gesamtkunstwerk), had made a specific situation for the German public in the nineteenth century to be able

to have mental and physical interaction. Wagner's success in these goals in the public is an important matter which will be studied in this research, concerning the socio-political and cultural conditions in nineteenth century Germany.

KEYWORDS: *Wagner, Romanticism, Schelling, Total artwork, The ring of Nibelung, Opera, Self-consciousness, Hegel*

AUTORE

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Introduction¹

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was a German composer, philosopher and writer born in Leipzig. His innovations in the fields of classical music and theatre in the nineteenth century created an artistic and intellectual school which had a deep effect on his contemporaries as well as next generations. Among composers, Wagner has a great number of written books and contents. We can find significant historical figures among those who followed Wagner or criticized him. His range of works is not restricted to artistic ones only; his ideas expanded to a wider range. As well as having an aesthetic function, his theories on the work of art affected culture, politics, and social life. Wagner's relation with important philosophical and political matters in the nineteenth century made him consider making works of art related to those matters. His innovations in "Total artwork" made a historical impact on art. His goals mostly relied on combining different features of art along with creating mythology. He made an effort to form a new type of tragedy with music by trying to return to the ancient Greek tragedy; because he believed that in order for the German culture to be reborn, modern art must face certain changes. Since one of the most significant qualities of the Greek tragedy was the use of music, Wagner believed he was able to make works of art to help improve public consciousness by combining music, drama, and mythological tales. In his idea, tragedy was able to merge all arts together, and since tragedy is based upon mythology and legends, it is not limited to a certain time and covers a wider range. In the first days of his artistic life Wagner wrote and performed numerous operas. However, after a long gap of not writing any operas he decided to restart his artistic career with a new approach. By writing the ring of the Nibelung, Wagner started a new path towards "Total artwork". Although he believed his works were not operas but "drama-based" works. In different texts his works are referred to as music-dramas, but Wagner himself prefers the name "Art of the future" as he states in his book: *The artwork of the future*. Besides being aesthetically innovative from a dramatic point of view, Wagner's works included many musical innovations compared to older operas. The Wagnerian opera had evolved from the system of individual arias to a longer music consisting interwoven and unrepeatable melodies. The use of music alongside drama was one of Wagner's most fundamental

¹ In this essay, self-consciousness is used in the Hegelian sense. It means the cognition of self which is obtained in relation to self and others. This sense of self-consciousness specifically is experienced in contrast with something other than itself; meaning that its existence is dependant and in relation to the other. The concept of Hegelian consciousness, which is explained thoroughly in his philosophic system, is used by Wagner as well. Wagnerian self-consciousness too is not a separate phenomenon from the world surrounding it, but it's a part of that world. Wagnerian self-consciousness finds its true essence by being a part of the world.

ideas about dramatic expression, which was carried out by the orchestra. Wagner invented a vast series of leitmotifs (will be explained further ahead) to dramatize the text and music. He tried to fit all on-stage elements and the text into musical themes. His skills in orchestral composition were an incredible feature in his works and made possible the composition of music which was not heard before.

Wagner started his academic and artistic studies and his activism in politics around the time when the Romantic Movement and German idealism were trending in German universities and young people were under the influence of them. Wagner could be considered between romanticism and idealism. So, in order to study Wagner's works from different aspects, and to study his political and artistic views, the historical process of Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth century must be examined, as well as the relations between romanticism and idealism and their relation to Wagner.

This research tries to examine Wagner as an artist who stands between romanticism and idealism by studying the philosophical and aesthetical structure of the two movements. While studying this structure in nineteenth century Germany, a rebirth is apparent in the path of theatre and romantic tragedies and alongside those, the Wagnerian drama. What Wagner tries to represent is somehow a will to return to the ancient tragedy. Now we must observe how Wagner could, through his music-dramas, move towards self-consciousness (as a Hegelian artist), considering the conditions in modern Germany and the socio-political and artistic changes of that time.

The ideas and actions of Wagner in politics and their relation to Schopenhauer's ideas

Wagner was a revolutionary anarchist in his early days. His political viewpoint was under the influence of Mikhail Bakunin, Feuerbach and Hegel. Alongside his closest friend Rockel, who was also an anarchist, Wagner engaged in political activities. His anarchistic opinions are clear through the writing of the ring operas. Wagner believed that an ideal world had existed in the past, and that we must attempt to recreate it. He had other liberal goals when he first began writing the ring. He planned to present the freedom of all human beings in the ending of the ring, in a way that masters could achieve their true freedom only when every human being is free.² When it came to the recreation of culture in western world, Wagner believed

² The influence of Hegel on Wagner is apparent here; master-slave dialectic.

societies must be harmonious; when humans recognize their nature and can maintain their unified identity with the nature. Wagner's main plan was to recreate an art that could return humans to their essence and could enclose and bind the state and the public. In "Art and revolution" he presents his idea about the reconstruction of art, and mentions that the only way to do so would be through revolution or revolutionary art. In his idea, a theatrical performance was similar to a revolution. Wagner attempted to present a true concept of revolution to his audience. After the defeat of liberal revolutions in 1848, Wagner's anarcho-socialistic opinions changed. After spending a difficult period and fleeing to Switzerland, Wagner applied notable changes to the libretti of the ring, and also to his opinions. A very important occurrence to mention at that time is Wagner's encounter with Schopenhauer's "The world as will and representation". After the defeats of revolutions, Wagner turned to Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy and all his operas and his ideas about the artwork of the future were influenced by the concept of will and nihilism. In the second part of "The world as will and representation", Schopenhauer states that the entire phenomenal world is a representation of the will. The will can be present in different qualities and scales in phenomena. The most important form of this will is the will to life. Schopenhauer explains this using the concept of suffering; to have the will is to suffer. Simply, it could be said that the only way to end the suffering in life is to stop having will. That is why when the will faces itself, man will deny life. Schopenhauer suggests asceticism and isolation will make life more bearable. In Schopenhauer's opinion, tragic joy is the highest joy in an artwork and he believed that the effect of tragedy is feeling the transcendental (Young, 2013). He admired tragedy for representing suffering and agony in life and believed the tragic experience to be the denying of the will. In Schopenhauer's opinion, the only ways to redemption from life's agony and from the will are asceticism and art.

The clearest representation of Schopenhauer's philosophy in Wagner's artworks is Tristan and Isolde. Schopenhauer believed the primary goal in a tragedy is redemption with the representation of death; that man can eventually embrace death as a way of exiting this world which is full of suffering and torment. Wagner, at least as an artist, was attracted to Schopenhauer's metaphysics; in the second act of Tristan and Isolde, Tristan finally pursues Isolde that it is only death that can separate them, and that it is only in death where their love can be fulfilled (Young, 2013). The third act of Tristan and Isolde is an attempt to investigate death, where Tristan seeks to be reborn after death so that he can be united with Isolde. Representing this kind of death will result in redemption afterwards. But it was in Parsifal that Wagner portrayed Schopenhauer's ideas on religion. In his late days and by performing Parsifal, Wagner referred to the Bayreuth festival as a holy festival and called it a "performance of holy festival". He transcended the aesthetical aspects of

his art to a religious function. However, restricting art to holy art and religious functions was not the only sign of the effects of Schopenhauer's philosophy on Wagner; it was a sign of Hegel's influence on him which will be argued further ahead. Wagner planned to turn the Bayreuth festival to a sacred location that could have potentials to have function in spreading self-consciousness and expanding social connections. He believed this approach to be a solution for the industrialization of art; to create spaces in which "a lovely and free communal life" can be developed and to encourage life and art to have a better relationship (Fischer-lichte, 2015). However, Wagner took a different path towards revolutionary art by trying to have a Christian function. By internalizing Christianity in his art, he made new aesthetical ideas about theatre and music. Wagner had reached all of his goals concerning communal musical-theatrical function when Parsifal was performed.

Wagner's significant musical qualities

Wagner believed the most complete musical instrument to be the human voice. In his viewpoint, a musical instrument is better than others if it can imitate the human voice better. For example, the Aerophone family are the closest to the human voice, and an instrument like the Clavichord is the farthest³. Wagner states that instruments like the Clavichord were made for the composer to be able to perform whatever he writes (Wagner, 1893). But doing so will weaken the musical expression and no mutual connection would be made in the audience when hearing an instrumental work of music; but when listening to a vocal work with a specific text, the audience could have a mutual experience. In Wagner's words: music must be expressive and must not try to create independent concepts.

Wagner's musical innovations could be categorized into different parts. Concerning harmony, there is no certain tonic tone throughout the whole music. In other words, in a vast scale, his music tends to move away from tonality. Although his music is not considered to be atonal, but the roots of atonal music could be traced to Wagner. A significant example would be the Tristan chord. In the prelude of Tristan and Isolde, a chord is played that cannot be easily explained by traditional rules of tonal harmony. In addition, the tonic changes quickly in Wagner's music, even inside a single musical phrase, thus the listener cannot easily hear a tonic. Furthermore, expanded harmonies, or in other words, chords that have more tones than ordinary chords in traditional music were used by Wagner in his music. The Tristan chord is

³ In "Opera and drama", Wagner presents this matter from a historical point of view.

a chord with many voices (some of which are removed) and the dissonance weakens the tonality.

In older operas, the structure of the opera is divided to Arias, Recitatives and dance tunes. Arias, which were called “Aria da capo” in early baroque, were parts in which the singer sang a vocal piece and usually consisted of three parts. However arias were not enough for the opera to proceed. In Recitatives, the performers spoke to each other in a melodic manner. Wagner mentions that the Aria was the basis of the opera. The structure mentioned above (Arias, Recitatives and dance tunes) changed over time but the fundamentals were unchanged. In nineteenth century operas Arias are still present; however it might be difficult to separate Arias from other parts in some instances. On the other hand, Wagner states that Recitatives are the only parts in which there is a chance for drama to be created; because the text can be uttered more easily compared to arias. In Wagner’s operas, this structure is no longer present. In his operas, during the whole work, there is an uninterrupted and continuous music during each act. The performers don’t sing Arias and don’t do Recitatives either. They sing continuous and unrepeated melodies that take different expressive forms as the libretto goes on. Thus the libretto and the music proceed in a parallel.

“Unending melody” is an important expression used to describe Wagner’s music. The reason for choosing this expression is that the music (Vocal and orchestral parts) and the libretto go on simultaneously. Thus, the music is not similar to Arias and the melodies are not repeated.

As mentioned before, in Wagner’s operas leitmotifs are used. They help the connection of vast parts of the opera (or in some instances like the ring operas connection between operas) and also help the unity of the libretto and the music, thus making the parallel procedure of the text and music easier. Leitmotifs are short musical ideas that are presented and repeated with a specific event, character, object, concept, etc. For example, the characters in the operas have special leitmotifs that are heard when they appear on stage or when other characters mention them. As mentioned above, leitmotifs are not restricted to characters; the spring, love, a sword, the ring and even the act of smithing have specific leitmotifs.

In Wagner’s works, throughout the whole work, there is a solid rhythmic structure, but it may not be easy to understand compared to older music (In other words, we might not be able to guess when the next note is to be played). For example, the prelude of Tristan and Isolde has metric rhythm but it might not be easy for the listener to guess when the next note will be played. This musical quality, along with the use of expanded harmonies, were musical innovations of Wagner which were made possible for musical innovations of other composers among who Franz Liszt was an important one. The effects of these musical qualities, like the lack of a clear

beat, were clearly made intentionally; since the rhythms were composed by Wagner in a clear way.

The birth of romanticism and its relation to Wagner's ideas

In order to comprehend Wagner's world in the nineteenth century, we must examine what was probably the most important event in that time and consider its contradictions with Wagner's ideas. In fact, a historical point of view would help this examination. Important socio-political incidents and events took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that changed the course of Germany's history. To begin with, the birth of romanticism is probably the most important of all. It is difficult to study romanticism and its history because romanticism has been the subject to many interpretations and theories and examining all of them would be impossible and has no place in this research. Here romanticism will be considered as an individual period in history and it will be examined as an intellectual structure. The path towards studying the Romantic Movement is not an easy one to take; from the way it is born to its political function and the state of art, etc. It would be incorrect to restrict romanticism to a movement in literature and art because many of the manifests in this movement have political, ethical, aesthetical and philosophical functions.

The Romantic Movement included intellectuals from a wide range with different theoretical perspectives. Many believe that this movement was made from revolutionaries after the French revolution and others believe it was made from liberal petit bourgeois. This contradiction was because the revolutionaries and the anti-revolutionaries in the French revolution called themselves romantic simultaneously. Years ahead, after a fall in the popularity of romanticism after the Second World War, many Marxists and even liberal critics believed romanticism was related to the Fascist ideology⁴ (Beiser, 2003).

Romanticism is indeed a kind of quality and condition and it's not only referred to a specific period. It could be said that the concept of romanticism is not only a historical one; For example, Carl Schmitt who was critical of romanticism believed that romanticism mostly has an individualistic feature. He stated that romantic statements are mostly based upon a specific subject or the individual person and that these statements are made in a transcendental way; that means with a specific feature of a person's existence rather than referring to a group of specified objects

⁴ Beiser explains this further the early chapters of "The concept of early German romanticism".

and being realistic.⁵ But it must be remembered that romanticism changed the world so much that the world after romanticism is not like the world before it. Many things must be considered when criticizing romanticism in a positive or a negative way, thus making the critique complicated. This complication is a result of the contradicting nature of romanticism and helps us reveal a hidden phenomenon:

With a glance at the history of the eighteenth century we find many occurrences that form conditions for the birth of romanticism. Alongside many critics, Isaiah Berlin in his book “The roots of romanticism” states that the primary root of romanticism is the negation of enlightenment.⁶ The impact of enlightenment increased in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and by defying traditions and supporting intellectualism, enlightenment caused wide changes. Enlightenment had begun in the seventeenth century in England and continued to the eighteenth century and it tried to banish the prospect of medieval ages. In this perspective everything moved forward in order and law; Wisdom was the source of everything; Religion and the church lost their influence and irrational matters were criticized by French philosophes (Berlin, 1999). The enlightenment, like romanticism was not a homogenous and harmonious movement and different theoreticians proposed different ideas. Figures like Rousseau in France and the “Sturm und drang” movement (which was a clear phenomenon related to romanticism) did not entirely defy the enlightenment perspective and were supportive of it up to some point. Movements like these tried to express new points of view related to enlightenment. Romanticism and enlightenment moved forward as a parallel, in a way that they could not be considered completely dependent or separated.

The romantics mostly tried to replace enlightenment’s tedious and grey rationalism with art and aestheticism and relied on intuitions.⁷ Although the romantics had disagreements about the statement above in different periods; some like Friedrich Schlegel were more extreme. The ideals of romanticism included a wide range of issues; one of the most important was “Communal life as a purpose”. Romantics valued life as individuals as well as a community. In some opinions life as an individual holds less value than as a community; the individual must sacrifice themselves for the purpose of the public.

⁵ On the other hand, Herbert Read believed romanticism to be a state of mind that could be found anywhere. Lovejoy, an important theoretician on romanticism, believed the word “Romanticism” to be free of sense in modern times, because of the many references it made.

⁶ Whether this argument is correct or not is important because by examining romantic ideas we might get closer to this argument’s validity, but many other critics believe romanticism to be the continuation of the enlightenment because many romantic ideas are similar to those of the enlightenment. In any case, romanticism in the eighteenth century helped the ending of the enlightenment.

⁷ There were other reasons as well, such as overcoming the spiritless and over-rational world and admiring humans and nature.

By the time early romanticism was starting to take shape, around the year 1797, many poets, critics and philosophers were active in Berlin. But the milestone was the year 1802, when meetings were held at Wilhelm Schlegel's house. This new literary circle was based on social ideas. Many famous figures were present at the meetings,⁸ but the pioneer was Wilhelm Schlegel. He founded "Athenaum" publications around the same time, where romantic manifests and critiques on aesthetics and politics were published. What was published in the Athenaum was a presentation of romantic ideals, and sometimes the authors were more than a single individual. The romantics sought common values and goals in the Athenaum.

One of the main features of early romanticism, which continued to exist afterwards, was the concept of "Bildung".⁹ This concept includes training and education of individuals for the sake of transcending self-consciousness as a goal. Bildung is interpreted in different ways from ethical, political art-state points of view. Considering Bildung ethically, individuals must move towards transcending their virtues. Politically, the public must do the same; meaning that the public and the state must move towards wisdom and education together. By the ideals of art, it is art that must educate and inform. This concept helps us understand Wagner's ideas about transcending self-consciousness through art better. It is said that Wagner's artistic and political activities were under the influence of this concept. The three points of view mentioned above are all present in Wagner's art. Wagner pursued the cohesion of the different concepts of Bildung for self-consciousness and public consciousness, especially at the beginning of his career in Bayreuth.

Having an aesthetic experience in romanticism should be considered as a whole. The concept of Bildung and communal life were applicable to other romantic ideals. Novalis and Schlegel who were known to be more radical among romantics presented their aesthetic ideals based upon the following concept: The world must be romanticized.¹⁰ This concept could be applied to politics and ethics as well. It is not limited to an individual, but the whole state must turn to romantic ideals and eventually turn into a work of art. This concept is broadened up to the point where the human life turns into an aesthetic whole.

Furthermore, in the development of the making of romantic world and the birth of the concept of romantic poem, romantics tried to prove that the creative actions of humans are in fact a representation of nature itself which has evolved. For these ideals to be possible to exist and for a cultural rebirth, the romantics sought a work

⁸ The Schlegel brothers, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), Holderlin.

⁹ The literal meaning is education and formation.

¹⁰ It was Novalis who presented this first.

of art which could unite society and nature and was made from a subject's active mind.¹¹

The historical gaps to cause such deep changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had happened years before. In fact, the main roots of romanticism must be sought in those gaps. The thirty years war which took place in the seventeenth century was one of the most devastating religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. But passing by the events of the war itself, it's what happened after the war that seems interesting. The war was especially destructive for the Germans. It destroyed the morale of the people and put the country through a state of retreat and poverty. This nationwide sense of retreat affected the German people. They felt a sense of weakness towards other nations, especially the French who had won the war against the Germans. This incident made an influence on art as well and caused a lot of changes. Works of art began to have a sense of arrogance. An ascetic way of life in Germany evolved into a state of an extreme introverted lifestyle. Artists of that time made works under the influence of that lifestyle (for example the *Trauerspiel*).¹² The aftershocks of the thirty years war directly made way for the Romantic Movement and nationalistic ideas. The concept of individualism and subjectivism which is present in romanticism could up to some point be explained by the ascetic mentality after the thirty years war. Wagner was no exception. Although many years had passed from the war, when Wagner had started his artistic life, the impacts of the war were still present. These impacts allowed Wagner to use nationalistic mythologies and lead his public towards communal goals. However, Wagner himself had experienced a period of ascetism in his lifetime when he was young, he tried to find a solution for it using art and political activism. But there were other reasons for the ascetic and introverted individualism to change over time. An important reason was Fichte's philosophy. The egoistic turn, of which Fichte was a pioneer in developing, changed the path of romanticism. Fichte used the concept of individualism to reach the concept of society, meaning that a person is a person only because he is related and connected to others. Fichte turned more extreme in this matter in his later days and developed a kind of nationalistic life.¹³ Wagner had studied Fichte in

¹¹ Novalis' ethical ideal was in poetry as well; he believed ethics to be poetry in its essence. They needed subjective artworks in order to create this culture. But creating the artwork was not the goal, it was unity in diversity that mattered. The diversity in nature had to unite in poetry, as the world was made of this unity. To Novalis, this matter had more importance; poetry must be active, it must become the action of a subject's mind. Conclusively, poetry and the romantic world was the goal of existence according to Novalis and Schlegel.

¹² This term was first used by Walter Benjamin in "The origin of German tragic drama" in 1928.

¹³ Even though Fichte's influence on the romantics is undeniable, his theoretical and practical researches were more in the field of post-Kantian idealism, and from a more general point of view he was a part of the German Idealism. But his concept of ego had a lot of influence on the romantics.

his early days and had been influenced by him when it came to remaking mythologies in order to expand national consciousness.

The individualization of political and social matters made way for many critics to relate romanticism to liberalism and the bourgeois class. The important point to be considered was the process of personalization and individualization that was a representation of the social order in the bourgeois class. Having absolute power and overseeing everything and at the same time being a leader for oneself was first born in eighteenth century bourgeois. In this period an isolated individual creates a world in their mind and acts inside this imagination. In this period politics turn into an entertainment and a game (Schmitt, 2017). From another perspective, some Marxist researchers' studies propose romanticism as a revolutionary movement against capitalism and while they believe romanticism to have many contradicting points, they hold a unity to it as well. György Lukacs was among the first to study the revolutionism and the outburst of romanticism against capitalism. Lukacs mostly preferred to bind the romantics to transformative movements than revolutionary ones. Another issue was beginning to develop alongside capitalism itself, and it was the alienation to the world and of the individual. Moving towards a state of isolation was a sign of the development of capitalism. Generally, many concepts and movements related to romanticism including romanticism itself were born in an attempt to return to the pre-capitalistic world. The admiration of romantics towards the past and the concept of nostalgia could be considered as an example. But this glance at the past was always united with a glance at the future by the romantics. It means that the past is an ideal and the future is a dream to return to that ideal. The past and the future turn into a utopia to chase. The romantic period went on in a dream which was destroyed by catastrophes. This would further turn into a state of paranoia¹⁴ and hold reality in suspension. It was like something hidden in the depths of history itself was changing everything unnoticeably.

The imaginations that created the romantic world caused the reality to become more subjective. The romantics sought a kind of free imaginary play, and it had to include aesthetical aspects as well. What pushed the romantics forward was their knowledge on how life could be more aesthetical. Their goals and plans were of absolute values and could often be summarized in words and lost their practicality afterwards. The world they lived in was of a state of suspension and an extreme subjectivity and of poeticising reality.

The romantics made many contributions to the world and among them were their ideas on aesthetics and nature which influenced art and up to some point science. Wagner must be regarded as a romantic who acted against capitalism. Many

¹⁴ Isaiah Berlin further explains paranoia in "The roots of romanticism"

romantic qualities are found in Wagner in his early days. But his unique difference was that he tried to apply a practical approach towards the aesthetical manifests of the romantics and not to restrict them to mere theory. But as it will be argued further ahead, many of his ideas failed. One of the most important impacts of romanticism on Wagner was the romantic and the national theatre in Germany. The romantic theatre, to which many qualities of romanticism apply, changed theatricality compared to what was present before. Now Wagner's doings under the influence of this theatre must be examined.

The romantic theatre and the birth of national theatre in Germany

The world of literature and theatre in the eighteenth century (before the birth of romanticism) had been aesthetically on a path towards decadence and had been far from a rebirth. The romantics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century believed in recreating the immortal artworks descended from the Elizabethan era. In theatre they tried to return to the Shakespearean tradition; Shakespeare's influence on romantic playwrights of Germany and France is clear. On the other hand, the romantics believed in the classical tradition as well and idolized ancient Greek tragedy writers (Steiner, 2013). At the time, through romantic manifests on theatre, the German national theatre is born. The romantics, after a lot of political and artistic frustration, moved towards nationalism. Almost all of the German romantics believed art and especially theatre to be good for a society's wellbeing and health.¹⁵ One of the theoreticians on this matter was Friedrich Schiller, who in the eighteenth century believed that theatre must be the voice of the German culture and also be a force to shape this culture.¹⁶ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing also agreed and believed the neoclassical theatre to be a lie. Such ideas can be seen in the theatres at Hamburg, Mannheim and Weimar in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The romantics tried to combine the Shakespearean tradition and the classical tradition in tragedies because they wanted to overcome the baroque and neoclassical theatrical traditions. The period of darkness in drama had worried them (Steiner, 2013). The lack of drama in society was equal to the lack of ethics and public health in society. Romantics believed the growth of theatre to be a cause for a healthy connection between the state and the public. As discussed before, the Romantic Movement was complicated, and this complication was apparent in the romantic drama as well. As a result of the fall of the tragic drama of the seventeenth century, the romantic trag-

¹⁵ In his manifests on art, Schiller explains this matter.

¹⁶ "National theatre" by Gary J. Williams published in "Theatre histories: an introduction".

edy developed with different nationalistic qualities in different countries and Wagner was no exception. What Wagner was pursuing in Bayreuth was the idea of combining the Shakespearean tragedy with the ancient Greek tradition of tragedy.¹⁷ Of course, the romantics wanted a tragedy that was not a mere copy of Greek or Elizabethan theatre. Wagner also sought a new method in theatre that was historical in its origins, was applicable to the present time and was not an exact copy of traditional theatre. He preferred Shakespearean tragedy a little more than the Greek tragedy. The reason was that he valued the individual; In the Shakespearean tragedy each character is an individual because the choir were no longer present. When individuality in characters of a drama is formed, every character, even the minor roles will have freedom of action and a personal voice of their own. The choir played an important part in the ancient Greek tragedy, but Wagner did not find it important anymore. Clearly Wagner did not deny the use of choir completely. For example, he uses the choir in some parts in the ring operas, some of which were removed in the editing, and some remained. Overall, he believed the choir must be removed so that individual subjective expression could be reached.

In Wagner's idea, mythology could reflect a nation's essence, and further, mythology could strengthen the idea of national theatre. A similar path was being taken by philosophers of that time. Fichte and Johann Gottfried Herder argue the unification of nations in their writings. Herder states that the spirit of a nation is a whole and believed the human essence could be sought through the German identity. His views on the German identity influenced the Romantic Movement. Fichte on the other hand broadened the concept of ego as an individual to ego as a whole, and eventually reached the concept of a nation and discussed liberty when it comes to a being a nation. Fichte was a defender of liberal ideas such as the unification of humankind and enlightenment of human beings. Wagner agreed on this. Although, he opposed the idea of creating a national theatre in his writings because he believed he was unable to fulfill this task; He tried to create a "theatre for Germans". He needed an artwork to return to Greek tragedy and mythologies in order to achieve his ideals. It could be mentioned that generally Fascism and other oppressing ideologies have no relation to what stated above. Wagner had different political views in his lifetime¹⁸. This will be argued further ahead.

At early nineteenth century, ancient legends and rites in Germany are returned to again along with ancient Greek mythology. German legends were mostly a part of national German epics which were referred to as "Patriotic poems". Wagner used

¹⁷ In the 6th chapter of "The death of tragedy, Steiner mentions the Wagnerian tradition as a bridge between the Shakespearean tradition and the ancient Greek tradition.

¹⁸ With his socialistic ideas, Wagner wanted a revolutionary art to chase public consciousness, and in his late days, by turning to Christianity, he considered transcendental art to be sacred.

these poems in the creation of the ring operas. He looked for a sense of tragedy that was empty of rationalism. In his “artwork of the future” he planned to resurrect the national interaction of the people in ancient Greece. What he sought was close to the concept of Bildung; by educating people with theatre, social interaction will be re-born. So, his audience had to be ideal, considering the fact that the Athenian audience in the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. had no clear similarities with the German audience of the nineteenth century. Also, romantics, including Wagner, did not aesthetically tried to resurrect the Greek tragedy. Because, as mentioned before, the qualities of the romantic tragedy are completely different from the ancient Greek tragedy.

Creating mythology in the nineteenth century was controversial. Because creating mythology was considered to be against science. The romantics tried to consciously create new mythology. The statement “We must create mythology because we no longer have any” is clearly not scientific. In romantic view, science destroys mythology. However, romantic views on science were somewhat complicated. For example, they tried to define the function of science with art. Schlegel, when explaining the romantic poem, did not restrict the poems to art and tried to define them with science; Science represented as a poetic expression. Romantics and idealists considered the separation of science and mythology and tried to apply a new point of view when it comes to creating mythology affected by science and art. Wagner also considered the unification of new mythology and science. His artwork, as his duty as an artist, was an immediate action that was done as a reunion of science and life¹⁹. He had a vast view on science, not only on the function of science. In *The artwork of the future* he states that the ideas that come to the minds of humans by the nature, and the humans unconsciously modeling them, create science; thus the subject moves towards self-consciousness. Upon the birth of science, man stands to life, just as he stands to nature (Wagner, 1895). But the path that science takes is a long one, from error to knowledge, from fiction to fact or religion to nature (Wagner, 1895). What Wagner pursued eventually was that in an artwork – a transcendental action in which the artist looks for truth – there are signs of science that transcend the art. He hoped to awaken human beings from their slumber and make them aware of their conditions. In “Art and revolution” he states that artworks must liberate the human spirit and that they must have nationalistic features. Afterwards he mentions that these features must not restrict the artwork and the people, and that they must be presented in a new way. It could be said that not only his artistic views, but his views on almost everything were affected by his political opinions.

¹⁹ In the 2nd chapter of “The artwork of the future”, Wagner presents his ideas about art and science in life.

The return of the romantics to classicism in theatre could be viewed from a different aspect. Romantics valued theatre as well as poetry and considered them to be transcendental arts. The romantic tragedy, formally and conceptually, and also considering its function in the society, no longer worked as the Greek or Shakespearean tragedy. The people were in constant agitation and frenzy during the revolutions that took place at that time. So, this agitation and frenzy was apparent in their lives and their art. The romantics sought the essence of liberty and its nature in humans. This search for liberty could be traced back to Jean Jacques Rousseau in a way. Rousseau who was among the most influential French theorists of the romantic period, valued social contracts and the essence of liberty; He believed the injustice in human societies affects our destinies. But in his idea this injustice was not a tragic error of human beings, but it was the result of unequal actions of some people that eventually affects the whole society. Ethically, Rousseau believed there was no natural urge in humans to do wrong, but that humans turned to corruption through wrong means. But what was the cure for these humans and societies? Just as other romantics valued *Bildung*, Rousseau valued the education and training of all humans. This quality is completely apparent in romanticism; the individual seeks perfection and to reach it they must overcome the old and traditional boundaries that are deep in our world. In Rousseau's view, an individual is not responsible for all of their crimes, and that a part of that responsibility is on the shoulders of proper education. Romantic interpretation of evil makes a way towards redemption. Their optimistic views on evil and on sin, were not present in Greek or Shakespearean traditions. In the ancient tragedies, evil and sins exist and they are a path to curses and sacrifices. The tragic character cannot defy their responsibilities when in crisis. The condition of a tragic character is tied to their lives and destiny, and even if there is a trap for them, they fulfill their responsibilities. In the old tragedy, there are contradictions of moral values that are found in life, and these contradictions are deep within the existence of humans and can devastate them. However, in a romantic tragedy, there is always another way for humans to make up for their past. Here a new concept is born from the romantic tragedies and that is: regret. In tragic characters of romanticism, there is a guilty conscience, and their redemption grows along with their guilt, thus changing their lives. Wagner's operas are close to remorse tragedies²⁰ of romanticism than ancient tragedies. These tragedies lack the tragic ending which is found in Greek tragedies. It could be said that this kind of tragedy was a result of the historical and social conditions of that time; they are a representation of the roman-

²⁰ Steiner uses this concept to explain the romantic tragedy including Wagner's (He uses the term "Melodrama" as a synonym for remorse tragedies).

tic's desire to passions and emotions and enjoying them. The remorse and eventually, the redemption of the romantic protagonist enlighten his consciousness. The concept of remorse for the romantics is completely contradictory compared to ancient tragedies. It was a representation of their dream for a better future. Of course, it should be mentioned that not all romantic tragedies could be considered to be remorse tragedies, because there are qualities in many plays of that time that are against what was argued before.

The romantic utopia was their dream of progress, on which many of their ideas were built upon. This utopia may only be destroyed by destructive exterior forces. A reproduction of this utopia was what Wagner considered from his early days. In the first drafts of Siegfried's libretto, during a climactic point in the opera, Siegfried enters Valhalla and tries to build a utopia and is successful. In the ring, Brunhilde also calls for liberty in a utopia for the humans. Wagner's imagination of utopia and its representation in his artworks were affected by his anarcho-socialist views. Some of these views are related to the paranoia in romantics, as argued before. This relation was because romantics, including Wagner were revolutionaries. Wagner believed we must look back to the past in order to build a utopia. There had been a time that free humans lived without the dominance of masters and gods.

New social conditions and the reproduction of new audience for the theatre in the romantic era

The definition of the audience turned into a functional sense in the nineteenth century. As a result of the German national theatre, artists demanded new audiences. It's correct to say that Wagner was one of the artists that put a lot of effort and based his art upon audiences. Since human societies were on a path towards decadence from many aspects and producing theatres with a political function was experiencing a downfall, the romantics believed that a glorious and lively theatre must be reborn. The search for a new audience must be based upon socio-political theories so that afterwards it could include aesthetical aspects as well. Wagner was successful in this matter; In Bayreuth he tried to find his audience with his theories and manifests. However, this search for audience was a result of that time in history. Revolutions and many disorders caused vast states of anxiety. The audience of that time was not in a state of peace and order, but was full of passions and emotions (Steiner, 2013,82-83). It was not quite easy to look for a new audience. After the industrial revolution and modernist movements, the audience of theatre looked for more excitement and could not be easily held down to watch a theatre in a hall. In Bayreuth, Wagner attracted his audience with gigantic and glamorous stages and by introducing the audience to a new space. Bayreuth was an attempt to be the heir of

Greek theatrical space. At that time when the public preferred new forms of entertainment rather than watching long theatres, Bayreuth was a new possibility of a theatrical location. This was the most important matter to the Wagnerian audience. They were mesmerized by the ideal theatrical location which was Bayreuth, thus did not pay a lot of attention to other issues. But something else was apparent among nineteenth century audiences; they were no longer similar in their perspectives. So, Wagner made changes in the traditional conditions of theatre depending on his audience. His philosophical and aesthetical ideas were in favour of changing the theatrical location. In Wagner's opinion, the Greek city-state was a historical ideal in which every individual is trained as an individual. He also states that the Greek art which was a glorious representation of tragedy, educated people and was helping the improvement of their consciousness. So, participating in theatre was considered very important and valuable (Fischer-lichte, 2015). As a result of this idea, Wagner believed the rebirth and growth of consciousness among German people was through tragedy. He created a new tragedy with the help of music. Wagner believed that tragedies were not only complete artworks, but they are a representation of a free social life and are signs of individual and communal consciousness. He wanted his audience to respond a similar answer like a civil society. His opera house in Bayreuth should have been able to work as an educational location to make the public conscious. Wagner's ideas were better in theory than practice. In practice, his ideas were far more enormous than what he had imagined. Of course everyone could enter the Bayreuth festival. Wagner was critical of the conditions of humans. He was always loyal to one of his arguments; that no compromise should be made with the common understanding of bourgeois of theatre as an industry, and also with a performance as a product that can be reproduced so that buyers can order it depending on their demands, as if performance is an industrial product (Fischer-lichte, 2015). These ideas were a cause for Wagner to think about creating a festival in an enormous location instead of ordinary theatre halls. He even wanted the festival to be free of charge for participants. This way, the audience found themselves in an ideal location. However, his ideas did not entirely turn out to be successful. The first Bayreuth festival took place in 1876. The audience were charged for entry. And they were exposed to a gigantic stage and location which was very impressive.

Nietzsche believed that the audience in Bayreuth lost themselves to this massive location. He also thought that a sense of fear was present in the audience in Bayreuth which made them forget their individual personalities, up to the point when they could not even criticise.²¹ Nietzsche, who had helped Wagner and his ideas a great

²¹ In *Ecce homo* Nietzsche criticizes Wagner and presents his last opinions on him.

deal by publishing *The birth of tragedy*, lost his interest in Wagner's ideas and artworks gradually. He even turned his back on his own ideas after publishing *The birth of tragedy*. In that book he states that tragedy is the transcendental art which says yes to life. He believed music to be the most important element in tragedy and that music is in its nature Dionysian. At that time, he adored Wagner and thought Wagner was the artist to carry the burden of reincarnating tragedy with his music. Nietzsche praised the revolutionary feature in Wagner's music and in his book "Ecce homo" which was published years after his separation from Wagner he states that he was turned into a Wagnerian from the very first notes of *Tristan and Isolde*. When *Tristan and Isolde* was first being performed, Nietzsche was still under the influence of Schopenhauer. He mentions that there is a Dionysian feature in that opera which was portrayed by Wagner's music.

It was with the premiere of *Parsifal* when Nietzsche was in some sense disappointed, and denied his ideas in the birth of tragedy. However, *Parsifal* was not the main reason for the friendship of Wagner and Nietzsche to end, since their relationship had fainted before that. It's clear that Nietzsche disliked *Parsifal*'s content and believed Wagner's perspective in *Parsifal* to be sickening. Nietzsche sought a rebirth in German culture to defy nihilism, and at some point he believed Wagner and his artwork hold this responsibility. It was because of Wagner and his artwork that Nietzsche was convinced that creating massive artworks and masterpieces were still possible (Kaufmann, 1975). In 1886, while working on a second edition of his book "The birth of tragedy", Nietzsche mentions that his opinions on Wagner and Schopenhauer have changed for a long time. As he states, he had replaced a positive life with Schopenhauer's pessimism, and he believed Wagner to be a symbol of everything that must be considered decayed. In a critical note on himself he says that his book, "The birth of tragedy", smells of Hegelianism and is very affected by Schopenhauer. In that book, Nietzsche confronts the standpoint of tragedy with dialectical and Christian standpoints. He believes the dialectical method of Socrates and the legacy it lays behind in history to be against tragedy. He also thinks Christianity will destroy tragedy because it's nihilistic and against instinct.²² In his view, Socratism and Christianity sicken humans and result in a state of nihilism and only art and music can confront them. Nietzsche thought that the period of cultural advancement was 500 B.C. in Greece, and the tragic festivals were a result of that. He further adds that the Greek pushed back nihilism with their art, thus we can do it as well. He mentions that the Greek did not fall to nihilism but made actions only with their arts: That is the Apollonian and Dionysian art (Young, 2013, 171).

²² In Deleuze's words, tragedy dies in three ways: First, it's killed by dialectics of Socrates. Second by Christianity and third by modern dialectics and Wagner.

Nietzsche always thought that tragedy was born from music and dance and that tragedy will find its origins by returning to using music. Wagner also believed that tragedy was made from several arts, most important of them being music. The Dionysian power that creates tragedy is prior to any ethical considerations, and as we might learn from Nietzsche's appeal towards it, tragedy and music give us the power of deep thinking (Bowie, 2003, 282). Nietzsche, up to some point like romantics and idealists, found the rebirth of German culture in reproducing German mythologies.²³ At first, he found this in Wagner's total artwork. But later, in "Untimely meditations" and "The case of Wagner" he disaffirmed his previous sayings. He found the pessimism and asceticism in Wagner's late works to be against the culture of "saying yes to life". Nietzsche criticised Wagner from theatrical points of view as well, and he believed that in Wagner's operas, music and drama are mere means for the performance of the performers (Nietzsche Contra Wagner, 1991). In "The case of Wagner" he writes that if Wagner's idea was that drama is the goal and music is just a means, his operas are the opposite and the performer's actions are the goal and drama and music are both just means to achieve this goal. In "The case of Wagner" he criticised Wagner's music as well, because music for Nietzsche had to be joyful. He asks himself: "What do I want from music? Cheerfulness as if my body is always seeking its peace. I want music because of this; While Wagner's music makes one ill" (Bowie, 2003, 275). Eventually Nietzsche criticises the rhythmic unrest in Wagner's music. He finds this music dangerous when it is limited to the act of the performer. In Nietzsche's opinion Wagner's music had roots of French romanticism and it could be more popular in France compared to Germany. What Nietzsche introduces about the role of music in the birth of tragedy is close to the role of tragedy itself; that tragedy and music aesthetically represent the most unpleasant events so that the unbearable might become bearable (Bowie, 2003, 267). However, Nietzsche's ideas on music and mythology, even though they were separated after some time, were still related to Wagner because even his late ideas were criticisms on Wagner. Nietzsche believed a lack of unity in Wagner's music made the listener swim in a never-ending ocean instead of dancing. It could be said that Nietzsche in his late days was as much against Wagner as he was under his influence in his early days. It must also be said that by publishing the birth of tragedy he attracted a lot of attention towards Wagner and won a new position for him among artists.

Nietzsche's perspective in "The birth of tragedy" was a positivistic method with science that was explained by an artist. The view on science as the one and only way

²³ Bowie states that there is a difference between Nietzsche and romantics and idealists. Nietzsche believed the rebirth of culture to be achievable through the reincarnation of German mythologies while some romantics and idealists tried to recreate older mythologies, and some other tried to create new ones.

to reach the truth was commonly accepted among romantics and even others in the nineteenth century. Years later he declared that that book was formulated based on Schopenhauer and Kant. By publishing *The birth of tragedy* Nietzsche came close to romantic traditions. Concerning the relation of Dionysus and music, he explained the will to life as Schopenhauer discussed it through Dionysus.

The shadow that had filled the distance between philosophy and science in the nineteenth century, had affected art as well. Mythology, science, and art changed the course of philosophy. *The birth of tragedy* represented the relation between Schopenhauer's philosophy and the separation of ethics and aesthetics, and also portrays art and mythology under the influence of the nineteenth century philosophical system²⁴. Schlegel, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, who were pioneers in early romanticism, had worked on similar subjects as *The birth of tragedy*. Wagner also does the same in *The artwork of the future*. But what was the turning point of these ideas?

Creation of mythology with science: Schelling and Wagner

In the oldest system programme of German idealism, written by Hegel and Friedrich Holderlin, a mythology of intellect is present. At the end of these texts, they seek a pluralistic approach towards imagination and art and speak of a mythology based on intellect that can combine the achievements of science, art, and critical philosophy altogether in society, exactly how old mythologies combined the nature and societies in traditional cultures (Bowie, 2003, 275). The attempt to return to mythology and creating new ones by the romantics and idealists was to make connections with the society. They believed that doing so will eventually unify the people and improve their consciousness; exactly what Wagner had in mind as well²⁵. However, Wagner did not just seek making mythologies and he wanted to connect art to politics and politics to art. As mentioned before, in *The artwork of the future* Wagner compares humans with nature. He also tells of necessity which is the force that makes life and pushes it forward. He states that everything is based on necessity and this necessity is the universal order in the nature. When humans become conscious of this necessity, they evolve from their animalistic unconscious life towards human self-consciousness and that is when intellect is made (Wagner, 1895). But from the moment that intellect is born, there comes error which is born of knowledge, and it

²⁴ In *Aesthetics and subjectivity* in the chapter: Nietzsche and the fate of Romantic thought, Bowie explores the relation between Nietzsche and romanticism concerning aesthetics and mythologies.

²⁵ However, Wagner did not try to create new mythologies and tried to revive old Germanic and Scandinavian mythologies.

is the first aspect of self-consciousness (Wagner, 1895). Wagner mentions that history is made of human errors that make way for human knowledge. This knowledge made by humans, makes the nature conscious of itself, as the nature turns into an object for the subject that is the human. He later explains art alongside knowledge. It is by art that humans know themselves and their lives and become conscious of them. Wagner's ideas about this matter are close to Schelling's, concerning the philosophy of nature. Schelling tried to explain the evolution of "ego" the same way that other forms of nature's evolutions, from inferior to superior, were explainable. He explains how an evolved form must have evolved from a less evolved one, and it must have passed a journey from the objective world of nature, as the single primary poem, towards the stage of being aesthetic (Bowie, 2003, 108). In *The system of transcendental idealism* Schelling mentions the higher forms of self-consciousness including art. He believes art to be a place for the mind to make itself conscious. To Schelling, an artwork is a tool for the conscious and unconscious to have action under the unity of theories and praxes. It is interesting that Schelling's theories on art, especially music and tragedy are similar to Wagner's. In his book *Philosophy of art*, Schelling presents his arguments concerning the representation of freedom using different forms of art. In his viewpoint, the role of art is transcendental, concerning necessity and freedom. He believes that drama has fulfilled this role very well. He studies different art forms and among them, the epic and lyric poems which may have connections to drama. His argument is that: epic poems are objective and can only represent necessity and lyric poems are subjective and can only represent freedom (Young, 2013, 76). So, he believes it's necessary for a form of art to exist to represent both simultaneously: He believes this form of art to be drama. Before Wagner thought about a total artwork, Schelling in "Philosophy of art" studies how different art forms can unite. He believes the ancient Greek tragedy to be the perfect example. Schelling made a connection between the operas of his time and ancient Greek tragedies (Schelling believed operas to be an inferior type of Greek tragedies). In *Philosophy of art* he asks: Can the opera return to ancient dramas which had music and singing? (Schelling, 1859)

Not considering if Wagner had or had not read Schelling's arguments, the concept of making communal artworks based on necessity and freedom was being made at that time, focused on aesthetics. It must be considered that in Schelling's studies about a public artwork, there is no sign of music as an art form that represents necessity and freedom. Schelling argues about music aesthetics separately but he does not pay attention to music in dramas.

The conscious subject of Wagner against mythology and nature

The approach of idealists and romantics towards art and philosophy and their relation to the world was somehow different after all. German idealism believes philosophy to be a conscious act which is the high intellectual form of actions done in the nature.²⁶ In fact, philosophy must make the world and its objects and their relation with humans understandable. But romanticism takes a different path; that philosophy is unable to explain what is deep within the human existence (Bowie, 1997). It is at this stage that romantics and idealists try remaking mythologies. As mentioned before, in the oldest system programme of German idealism, the idealists present their new schemes concerning philosophy, freedom and mythology (including Schelling in "System of transcendental idealism"). But among romantics, Schlegel, in his book *Discourse on mythology*, proposes new matters, different from what idealists presented. Schlegel, similar to Nietzsche in his first book (*The birth of tragedy*), separates the aesthetical and the ethical; this is the differential point between romantics and idealists.²⁷ The important point concerning Schlegel is that he explains the lack of acceptable art (in his own opinion) in relation to a new creation of mythology. In a part of *Athenaum* he states that making new mythologies cannot continue the path of ancient Greek mythologies, and that it cannot use aspects of the real world as the Greek mythologies did (Bowie, 2003).

On the other hand, Schlegel thinks that new mythology must be a combination of all arts and related sciences, thus making a new culture; this is the way for them to be successful. Schlegel's way of unifying arts and sciences for representing mythology was an attempt to combine mythology and art, like other romantics (like Johann Georg Hamann) (Bowie, 2003). Romantics believe the source and function of arts and mythology to be the same, and that it the nature. The harmony between mythology and nature affected Wagner as well. Wagner, by trying to leave old mythologies behind and recreating them, tried to defy the old aesthetic rules and create new ones in favor of awareness and consciousness. His use of mythology alongside music changes the way art works. Subjects reach self-consciousness by returning to nature and mythology, which is a form of primitive nature. A conscious subject finds their identity with mythology. It could be said that Wagner stands right between the romantics and the idealists. The connection he makes with music creates a new aesthetic in the process of making an artwork. Using a music that passes existing forms and new ways of combining musical material, he tried to resurrect national mythologies (Bowie, 2003). Schelling on the other hand believed that mythologies must be wholly recreated and that recreating ancient mythologies in national favors is

²⁶ Schelling explains this up to some point in "System of transcendental idealism".

²⁷ However, Schelling tries to connect art to ethics in a writing in *Athenaum*.

wrong. Like Wagner, Schelling believed that recreating mythologies must be done by reason, and also thought that the function of mythology is being communal and public. In Schelling's viewpoint, tragedies are a matter of the public and they will fail for individuals. Wagner on the other hand thought the creation of tragedies was through mythology, and that public consciousness was achievable through art. But gathering all the attention towards mythology could have potential political dangers as well. Aestheticizing politics was an important matter in the nineteenth century that was up to some point born out of the recreation of mythology. The clearest danger would be the rise of the Nazi party and their abuse of art and mythology in the twentieth century. By abusing aesthetic matters and using them in their favor politically, the Nazi party tried to draw the ideas of romanticism and idealism towards themselves. At the time when the Nazi party was rising, arts were experiencing complicated changes. Wagner's art was changed in nationalistic favors after his death by the Nazi party. Wagner's relation to the Nazi party is not limited to nationalistic use of mythologies, but a main point of concern would be the book "Jewishness in music". However, it would be incorrect to think of Wagner as an artist in favor of the Nazi party, considering his background in political acts and his ideas concerning science and art. The interest of the Nazi party towards Wagner's ring as a national and patriotic artwork was just their abuse of this work; because even considering the concepts in the ring operas, they are clearly against Nazi ideologies. Wagner tried to give socio-political functions to aesthetic aspects of art, thus he used northern European mythology alongside complicated music to create a new drama. But he never knew how this could be dangerous in the future. This matter was observable for other romantics and idealists as well; that an artwork by an artist, even if intended to have socio-political functions, may be misunderstood by others, or be left without any attention.²⁸ All modern art had actually faced this issue, including Wagner. Although Wagner's viewpoint for reaching his goals was somehow similar to the oldest system programme of German idealism, the political function he meant to achieve was different from them. Some movements in the nineteenth century affected Wagner's political viewpoint, thus making him responsible for art in the future.

Spirit's path towards self-consciousness and the action of audience

"It is the audience that creates everything in their minds". This sentence which was stated in *Opera and drama* by Wagner reveals one of his most fundamental ideas on tragedy. In his idea, it is the audience that makes a new aspect in a performance.

²⁸ Bowie further explains this in the chapter: "German Idealism and early German Romanticism".

He describes this further when explaining himself about Shakespearean tragedy. He believed the origins of modern drama to be two things: medieval romances and Greek drama. The path of dramatic literature had moved forward from these two, and the best examples would be Shakespeare's and Racine's tragedies. Wagner includes Shakespeare's tragedies (He uses the term Shakespearean romances) as descendants of medieval romances and Racine's tragedies as descendants of Greek tragedies. Wagner believed that Shakespeare turned the narrative romances of medieval times to drama and had developed features that were not existent before (such as action, description) (Wagner, 1893). In Wagner's opinion Shakespeare adds action and stage to medieval romances and improves the role of the performer in representing medieval characters. But Wagner believes that the aspect of history and the aspect of romance, which can be found in Shakespeare's works as well, can be changed and influenced by the audience. In fact, it is the audience that shapes the qualities of the theatre with their creative interpretations. By imagining many events that take part in the play, the audience chooses how they will reach the truth. Wagner's idea of the audience's function was not in the ways of sympathy or emotional reactions. What he means by the audience's imagination is their comprehension of the play so that the aesthetic experience of the play would let them transform the outer matter to the inner. He was hoping that by participating in a new location with a new theatrical identity, his audience would be encouraged to do socio-political activity. His artwork was neglecting this activity up to some point. Although his intention was to spread self-consciousness by representing mythology and primitive human essence in the nature, the relationship between the audience and the performance in Bayreuth was against this. Wagner did not wholly deny the function of sympathy in theatre, since emotions and passions of the audience, when watching a play with music, was inevitable.

The dominance of the performance on the audience in Bayreuth denied the interaction of the audience. Of course, the theatrical way which Wagner had chosen was not able to include interaction, but it was in contract with Wagner's ideal for an artwork. Wagner's attempt was to use music to solve this contraction so that music with theatre could be a new aesthetic experience for the audience and an opportunity of awareness. By being present in that location and event, the audience was supposed to have some interaction with the artwork. In *Opera and drama* Wagner states that moving towards a specific theatre, which had happened in Germanic nations, was a movement towards consciousness. The Greek tragedy which had many social functions was resurrected by Wagner and his combination of arts. But the socio-political changes in Germany in the nineteenth century changed the need for art as a means for consciousness. Wagner thought that by mythology, which is considered a national phenomenon, he could find a way by exciting people's shared experiences as a German nation to increase the people's awareness of their politics and

their art. Representing concepts in Operas with expressive music could give the audience an opportunity to think and interact. On the contrary, Wagner's operas in gigantic stages in a massive location and the accompaniment of the orchestra for four hours changed the course of self-consciousness to a state of being stunned and astonished for the audience.

Wagner's ideas about aesthetics were up to some point under the influence of Hegel. In *Aesthetics, lectures on fine arts* Hegel explains his view on art and its position compared to religion and philosophy. In his categorization, he first puts philosophy and then religion. The third place goes to art, which in his view holds less importance than religion and philosophy. Hegel believes philosophy, religion and art to be means for the spirit to reach self-consciousness. Although he chooses the third place for art, he states that through art, absolute cognition can be achieved. In fact, art is an absolute matter for the spirit because of its nature in reaching the truth, but it is a little more limited than religion and philosophy. Hegel believes art to be a part of sensory intuition; meaning that art can present the truth to the mind through sensory forms. In fact, understanding art is done in a sensory and immediate state, thus the absolute is understood this way. Art can be explicit when it comes to cognition and can help the spirit reach self-consciousness. Wagner, who had used Hegelian aesthetics and dialectics in his ideas, looked for the transcendence of the spirit towards self-consciousness as well. He combined different arts in an attempt to lead a unified art towards the truth. But in the nineteenth century, when modernistic qualities are on a rise, could a return to mythology as a communal and unconscious function be of use? This matter was argued by many thinkers including Karl Marx; that what chance would art and mythologies and nature have in the shadow of science and technology? Wagner knew of this of course, and he used music and other arts alongside mythology as a solution. Art of that time could make the imaginations more expressive and work as a means towards the truth. But it was not enough, because when science became dominant on everything including the nature, mythology and art were not even considered important. Even so, mythology was still an important matter of thought and many artists worked on it.

Wagner knew the unrepresentative features of music very well and used mythology in these features as well, and he solved the contradictions of the two in the form of drama. Wagner's idea in *Parsifal* could be explained by the Hegelian categorization of absolute cognition. Hegel, when explaining religion which he believes to be higher than art, believes that in religion, the absolute becomes inner and compared to art, religion can apply consciousness by pictorial thoughts (Hegel, 1975). In Hegel's view, while art can represent the truth of the spirit in a sensory sense, religion can internalize the quality of worship in a subject, something which art in

unable to do, because art is never objective. In *Parsifal*, which Wagner somehow believed it to be his testament, he sought a religious concept in the forms of a mythology. Of course, Hegel's views on religion are vaster than what Wagner presents in *Parsifal*, and Wagner sought the internalization of concepts by art. By presenting Christian concepts and medieval mythologies in Bayreuth as a holy festival he tried to guide his audience to the internalization of feelings. By taking a turn towards religious concepts, Wagner attempted to find the spirit of the society in self-consciousness, and he believed it to be easier if he used religion; because religion and the act of worshiping is an inner action and kept the audience deep within their thoughts. In fact, Wagner encouraged his audience to combine the inner and the outer, and he made a new path in the representation of arts by doing so.

Conclusion

Wagner's actions towards the evolution of art could be considered Avant-garde. As an Avant-garde artist in the nineteenth century, however he tried to continue the path of ancient Greek tragic tradition, he attempted to deconstruct the old art and create artworks that were convenient for his time. Whether or not he was successful in spreading self-consciousness or not is a complicated matter that requires a vast historical viewpoint to interpret. The revolutionary quality in Wagner's works (especially his early works), were able to provoke the public. By declaring a breakaway from old artistic traditions, he worked on the art of his time and sought a new artwork that had communal functions in a world in which art was on a path towards decadence.

Wagner's relation to the romantics and the idealists, apart from general aesthetic viewpoints, was the concept of freedom and human society. The necessity of freedom, about which the idealists including Hegel had argued, encouraged Wagner that it was in the unification of man and nature where public freedom was achievable. The ideals of romantics and idealists concerning cognition are related in some ways yet are different in other ways. The subject's cognition of the objective world and of nature, which was restricted to the subject's comprehension or the object's potential in being comprehended in late idealists, evolves into the unity of the subject and object. This is the viewpoint upon which Wagner bases his manifest in *The artwork of the future*. The affirmative freedom that Wagner presents using drama and music, expresses the subject's cognition of nature as the movement of the spirit towards self-consciousness. This freedom is not for an individual; it is public, and it can only be necessary and be achieved in the public. Wagner's art tried to remove the dichotomy of nature and freedom so that the subject and the object can

be united for the improvement of self-consciousness. This is exactly what Hegel argues in his dialectics and historical necessity. Eventually, as the truth finds meaning in becoming itself, which is the truth, the sublation of contradictions for transcendence of self-consciousness finds meaning in the becoming of the subject and its unity with the nature. Wagner attempted to unite science with nature, and art with religion, so that they can all be used for transcending the spirit of the history. On the other hand, he assumed that the only way to increase awareness in a nation and transcending self-consciousness is the use of mythology. He used a combination of arts to spread a transcendental consciousness and tried to create a location for the audience to interact and served as a utopia. However, Wagner did not suppose that the way that science and modernism were spreading their dominance over the world in a fast pace was going to affect people's lives completely; in a way that recreating mythologies and expressing contradictions will not be able to help public self-consciousness.

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