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Paul du Quenoy, *Wagner and the French Muse: Music, Society, and Nation in Modern France*. Bethesda, Palo Alto, London: Academica Press, 2011. xi + 219 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$79.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 1-930901-80-1.

Review by Margaret Miner, University of Illinois at Chicago.

As Paul du Quenoy puts it in his introduction, *Wagner and the French Muse* is conceived as a comprehensive “book about France’s reception of the most controversial German cultural figure, Richard Wagner” (p. 3). On the whole, the book successfully realizes this aim: it is a wide-ranging study that Quenoy shapes into a pleasantly readable, extensively documented narrative. Organized chronologically, it moves from Wagner’s first known contact with France in 1833 to Wagner’s artistic presence in the France of today. But Quenoy convincingly emphasizes that it is the three major conflicts involving France and Germany—the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and the two World Wars—that lend particular interest and complexity to the history of Wagner’s French reception. Underpinning this argument is Quenoy’s tacit but persuasive claim that French opposition springing from international politics never constituted more than a passing obstacle to France’s ongoing appreciation of Wagner’s operas.

The first two chapters of *Wagner and the French Muse* examine the half century between 1833, when a French music periodical first mentioned one of Wagner’s early compositions, and 1883, the year of Wagner’s death. In “On my true path’: Beginnings, 1839-1860,” Quenoy details Wagner’s first extended stay in Paris, a three-year interval (1839-1842) that “ended in ignominy” amid “the deprivations of poverty, the frustration of genius, the pettiness of bureaucracy and officialdom, the dismissals of hostile or indifferent colleagues” (p. 17). Wagner left Paris hoping never to return but, as Quenoy wryly explains, found himself nonetheless pushed back to France by both the political events of 1848 and his obstinate longing to conquer the French capital musically. A series of brief returns throughout the 1850s culminated in a second prolonged stay (1859-1861) for the purpose of staging *Tannhäuser* at the Opéra. “Full of Enthusiasm for the New Art’: Growth, 1860-1883” traces the nerve-racking preparatory maneuvers that led in the end to three catastrophically chaotic performances of *Tannhäuser*, followed by stinging reviews and hostile caricatures of the composer in the Parisian press. But Quenoy insists that “these humiliations did not mean that Wagner was finished...as a figure of some popularity among the French” (p. 45), given the dogged persistence of his French defenders: writers Baudelaire, Champfleury, Gautier, Zola; artists Fantin-Latour and Cézanne; and the conductor Jules Pasdeloup, among others. Even the Franco-Prussian war and the scathing dramatic satire with which Wagner petulantly attacked the French in 1873 failed to get him silenced in France: “nation, state, war, personality all stood powerless before the appeal of Wagner’s music,” according to Quenoy (p. 64).

The two middle chapters of the book center around the musical consequences of France’s involvement in World War I. In “The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived’: Apotheosis, 1883-1914,” Quenoy explores the three decades between Wagner’s death and the war’s onset, underlining the role of French literary figures in efforts both “to popularize the composer” and to denounce “Wagner’s bastardization for mass appeal” (p. 78). Just as French operagoers came during these years to regard the annual Bayreuth Festival less as a pilgrimage than as a tourism opportunity, French composers engaged in an

increasingly ambivalent struggle to position their own work with respect to Wagner's influence. When war was declared in 1914, French composers split between those wishing to ban German music in general and Wagner's operas in particular (Saint-Saëns and other members of the newly founded "League for the Preponderance of French Music") and those favoring continued access to Wagner's music. As Quenoy notes in "The Patrimony of All Humanity': At War, 1914-1918," one of the chief economic and artistic victims of this debate was the Paris Opéra, which found itself temporarily unable to stage the Wagner operas that had brought in a large part of its revenue before the war.

The final two chapters of *Wagner and the French Muse* examine the century between the end of World War I and the present. Quenoy outlines the "Wagnerian Renaissance" (p. 133) in France during the interwar years, a renewal marked not only by the Paris *Ring* cycle of 1929 but also by the flowering of French musicological interest in Wagner, with important studies by Mauclair, Curzon, Prod'homme, Reynaud, and Fourcaud, as well as a special Wagner issue of the *Revue musicale* in 1923. With the rise of Nazism and the approach of World War II, however, French musicians and intellectuals were once again divided between those (such as André Gide) who were tenaciously devoted to Wagner's music and those (exemplified by Paul Claudel) who now ferociously objected to it. During the occupation, various French artists and administrators saw to it that most Wagner operas were performed about as frequently as before, which led to harsh and controversial charges of collaboration following the war. But Wagner performances continued to draw enthusiastic audiences after 1945: "An Amnesty for Wagner? Yes!": Postwar, 1944-2009" recounts the return of French singers and conductors to the Bayreuth Festival once it reopened in 1951, as well as the staging of Wagner operas in France up to the present. A second generation of French scholarship similarly reinvigorated Wagner studies after the war. Quenoy touches especially on the contributions of such intellectuals as Beaufrils, Digeon, Bourgeois, Schneider, Golea, Guichard, Cœuroy, and Lévi-Strauss to "the reemergence of Wagnerian respectability" (p. 173).

Coming as it does near the end of Quenoy's narrative, this emphasis on postwar Wagner scholarship creates a slight dissonance within the book. In earlier chapters, Quenoy himself cites passages from the French scholars he will later signal (notably Curzon, Reynaud, Fourcaud, Cœuroy, and especially Guichard), implying their unbiased authority as sources of support for his historical narrative. But in "An Amnesty," Quenoy belatedly problematizes their reliability, as, for example, in the case of Guichard: "Claiming scholarly impartiality, Guichard nevertheless confessed an admiration for Wagner's life and work as 'a prodigious adventure...'" (p. 174). Although such slippage between chapters causes no major difficulties, Quenoy's book would have been stronger had he contextualized his sources more thoroughly from the beginning. Also worrisome is Quenoy's tendency throughout *Wagner and the French Muse* to glue reductive or speculative--and sometimes inaccurate--labels onto French literary figures. With misused expressions such as, for instance, "decadent" ("[Gautier's] decadent novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*" [p. 27], "Baudelaire, a famous decadent" [p. 35], and "Decadent aesthete that Proust was" [p. 115]), Quenoy not only gums up lines of argument that would otherwise be clearer, but also leaves misleading impressions of the French authors involved. One may perhaps reasonably expect that readers of this book will be familiar enough with French artistic and intellectual history to resist the pull of simplistic labeling, but it nonetheless would best be avoided.

Taken as a whole, though, *Wagner and the French Muse* is enjoyable and instructive to read. Quenoy concludes with a brief overview of the ways in which "Wagnerian history is still being made in France" (p. 191), highlighting in particular the new *Ring* cycle production begun at the Opéra Bastille in 2010. Directed by Günter Krämer and accompanied by the publication of the gigantic *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique Wagner*, this *Ring*, insists Quenoy, "has unfolded as a thoroughly European affair," broadly "international in outlook" (p. 192). As such, France's latest *Ring* exemplifies the durable welcome ultimately offered there to Wagner, a welcome that has overcome the vicissitudes of three major wars to keep Wagner's works in lively contact with French musical culture.

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