

***JUDITH
GAUTIER***

A photograph of a desk with a lamp and papers, serving as the background for the text.

***RICHARD
WAGNER AND
HIS POETICAL
WORK, FROM
"RIENZI"
TO "PARSIFAL"***

Judith Gautier

Richard Wagner and His Poetical Work, from "Rienzi" to "Parsifal"

EAN 8596547330400

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



Table of Contents

[RICHARD WAGNER.](#)

[POETIC WORK.](#)

[WAGNER'S POETIC WORK.](#)

RICHARD WAGNER.

Table of Contents

It was under rather peculiar circumstances that the name of Wagner was mentioned in my presence, for the first time, the evening of the first representation of *Tanhäuser* in Paris. I had left school the day before on a vacation, and if this great combat in regard to *Tänhauser* had been mentioned in my hearing, I, at least, remembered nothing of it. I was accidentally crossing the Passage de l'Opéra with my father, the evening of this representation, during an *entr'acte*. The passage was crowded; a gentleman, who approached my father with a bow, stopped us. He was rather small, thin, with hollow cheeks and a prominent nose, a broad forehead and brilliant eyes. He began to speak of the representation, at which he had been present, with malignant intensity, and such a ferocious joy at seeing the confirmation of its failure, that, carried away by an involuntary sentiment, I suddenly emerged from the silence and reserve imposed upon one of my age, to cry with astonishing impertinence, "In hearing you, sir, it is easy to divine that a great work is in question, and that you speak of a brother-artist."

"Now, what has come over you, naughty child," said my father, wishing to reprove me, but quietly laughing to himself. "Who is it?" I asked, when the gentleman had left us. "That was Hector Berlioz."

I have never forgotten this incident, and I have seemed later to see in this sudden movement of anger, which roused my young conscience to indignation in so singular a manner, a sort of presentiment—something which premonished me

that one day I should become a passionate admirer of this artist, whose name I now heard for the first time.

It seems evident that, at the moment when a new genius reveals itself, a little group of chosen mortals springs to life, called to form about him a devoted company to defend him, to console him for all but universal hatred, to sustain him in his agonies, all the while upholding the divinity of his inspirations. It was doubtless my vocation to become a disciple of this new hero, to understand and believe in him, for I was influenced by no one. One day chance placed in my hands the score of the Flying Dutchman. My music teacher, who hired music at Flaxland's, had taken this volume, among others, without knowing its contents, and left it with me until the next lesson, as it was inconveniently burdensome. I had profited little by my lessons, and was a most indifferent pianist; notwithstanding which, after having deciphered in the most incomplete and crude manner this unknown score, I was entirely overcome, and in spite of my numberless mistakes, the grandeur and meaning of this music were revealed to me by a sort of intuition. I could not be persuaded to leave the piano; I became infatuated, and my friends tried in vain to get the score out of my hands. From this moment Richard Wagner had one more faithful disciple.

When, in 1868, I wrote several articles upon his works, I had still a very imperfect knowledge of them from more or less satisfactory executions upon the piano and desultory fragments heard at the popular concerts. I was much alarmed at my own audacity, after having addressed these articles to Wagner, then at Lucerne, accompanied by a letter, begging him to aid me kindly with his advice for their correction and completion. I hoped and waited for an answer with extreme anxiety: would it come? I could not believe it, and yet I could think of nothing else. I could hardly sleep, and as each morning passed, and the

messenger brought nothing, my heart filled with anguish. One day, however, I spied the Lucerne postmark upon an envelope addressed in an unknown hand, which I immediately recognized as remarkable.

I held this letter a long time between my fingers before opening it. I experienced a strange emotion—a sort of fear. How had I dared, with my heedlessness, characteristically French, to write, confiding alone in my instinct, upon the works of this artist, for whom I felt already such an enthusiasm that I could only imagine him as existing, after the manner of the gods, upon an inaccessible Olympus. Was this letter really from him? I opened it at last, four pages of elegant handwriting, very legible, and at the last line the magic signature. The letter began thus: "Madam—It is impossible that you could have experienced the slightest doubt of the touching and kindly impression made upon me by your letter and your fine articles. Accept my thanks for them, and permit me to count you among the small number of true friends whose clear-eyed sympathy is my only glory. There is nothing in your articles to correct, nothing to suggest; but I perceive that you have not yet a thorough knowledge of the Mastersingers." He then gave me an interesting explanation of the introduction to the third act in the Mastersingers, which had been performed by Padeloup a short time previous at the popular concerts. The letter ended thus:—

"Pardon me, madam, if I venture to complete, above all with the aid of my bad French, your acquaintance, otherwise so profound and intimate, with my music, by which you have truly touched and surprised me. I shall probably visit Paris before long, perhaps even this winter, and I rejoice beforehand in the true pleasure of taking you by the hand, and telling you face to face of

the pleasure you have given to your truly obliged and devoted,

RICHARD WAGNER."

I waited in vain for this proposed journey. Wagner did not visit France during that winter. Nor has he come since then. There was but one thing to be done—go to Lucerne. But how should I be received? Fantastic legends were reported in regard to Wagner; among others, it was related that he had in his house a seraglio, composed of women of all colors, from all countries, in magnificent costumes; but that no visitor crossed the threshold of his dwelling. On the other hand, persons who pretended to know him intimately, depicted him as an unsocial man, gloomy and sullen, living in jealous retreat, having for sole companionship two large black dogs. This wild solitude was tolerable, and even pleased me; but the idea that a feeling of polite gratitude might force him to break through it in my favor troubled me greatly. On this account I wrote an extremely complicated letter, saying, that passing through Lucerne by chance, only passing, I begged him to inform me if he were still there and would permit me the pleasure of greeting him. By this arrangement the fear of his disturbance being prolonged beyond that of a short interview would be averted. To tell the truth, chance had nothing to do with this journey, and there was nothing to hurry me. The following letter entirely reassured me:

"Madam—I am at Lucerne, and I have no need to tell you how much pleasure I shall have in seeing you. I shall but beg you to prolong your sojourn at Lucerne in order that the happiness you accord me may not vanish too quickly. I suppose that you go to Munich for the Exposition of pictures; however, as I have the presumption to believe that it will be agreeable to you to hear some of my works, I would inform you that the

representation of Tanhäuser, Lohengrin, Tristan, and the Mastersingers will take place in the month of June, that the theatre is at the present moment closed, and that Rhinegold will be given at the earliest on the 29th of August, if indeed it be given then. But I trust that neither the postponement of the exposition, nor the closing of the theatre, will retard your visit to Lucerne. Quite on the contrary, I shall hope for a prolongation of your stay here, and while begging you to kindly notify me by a word, of the day when you expect to arrive, I pray you to accept the assurance of my respectful gratitude.

RICHARD WAGNER."

I arrived in Lucerne on a beautiful afternoon in the month of July, 1869. On entering the station I looked out of the carriage-door, when I suddenly perceived Wagner on the platform. He did not in the least resemble the unfavorable photographs which I had seen. I had no hesitation in recognizing him and ran toward him. We shook hands in silence, and he enveloped me with that intense glance which is peculiar to himself, and seems to pierce one's soul. I experienced no embarrassment during that moment of strange silence, in which my heart was, so to speak, bare beneath his gaze, but a profound emotion, a wild joy. "Come," he said, offering me his arm, "If you do not care for magnificence, the Lake Hotel will please you; I have engaged rooms there." The hotel was near by, and we went on foot. He stopped a moment on the way, and with a very grave, almost solemn expression, said to me: "We are bound by a very noble sentiment, madam." But an instant later, after having recommended me to the innkeeper, he took leave of me. "I am going to prepare for your reception," he said, "else I should be stupid. Come presently when you have taken a little rest." From my window I saw him move away with a rapid step, cross the old bridge of Lucerne, and