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Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand by Nicholas Vazsonyi (review)

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in particular, are well worth reading. Still, the historical problem remains: cavalry may have stayed in the field, but a Wehrmacht that deployed hundreds and hundreds of divisions could find use for only a lone cavalry division for most of the war. Had cavalry become obsolete by this point? Perhaps not. But it is clear that in the course of the seventy-five years under discussion in this monograph, these “riders of the apocalypse” were ridden off to the margins of history.

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Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand. By Nicholas Vazsonyi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp 236. Paper \$35.99. ISBN 978-1107404397.

In order to cope with an addition to the immense literature on Wagner, the scholar's mind must go through a series of automatic sorting functions. Because this particular composer has always been so controversial, one of the first sortings has to do with whether the author is a “friend” of Wagner or “foe.” Reviews of Vazsonyi's book thus far, including those for the German translation (*Richard Wagner. Die Entstehung einer Marke*, trans. Michael Halfbrodt [Würzburg, 2012]), have generally emphasized a fresh, new viewpoint, as opposed to one tending towards apology or critique. This first classification attempt, then, seems to be unhelpful. Another basic sorting function is to place the author in relation to other authorities. Nicholas Vazsonyi, as a professor of German Studies, is by definition not a member of the musicological Wagner establishment. This seems to indicate a shift of disciplinary boundaries from the understanding of Wagner primarily from a musicological perspective, with cultural studies as an ancillary venue. The book's title resists easy classification as well. Although it announces the study of the promotion of a brand, Vazsonyi does not draw extensively on the relatively new academic fields of advertising, travel, and leisure studies. Rather, his approach is informed, broadly speaking, by the Frankfurt School critique of the culture industry. He is more interested in art “on the market” as one of the defining conditions of modernity rather than analyzing cost-benefit margins in terms of actual numbers. More recent work by Pierre Bourdieu and Friedrich Kittler is used effectively to add nuance to the understanding of the marketplace of art in terms of sociology and media studies. Vazsonyi mentions in the book's Epilogue that he considers Nietzsche the most important critic of Wagner, and even attributes to Nietzsche “the main thrust of this book” (206). Although some of the vocabulary may be new, then, the book's basic aim is part of a long tradition, starting with Nietzsche, of trying to understand Wagner as the very incarnation of modernity. Vazsonyi's appropriation of “product placement,” “infomercial,” “package deal” and other terms

is used for shock value, to highlight the distasteful quandary of the modern artist: that high art must be marketed.

Art consumers determine the value of the artwork, whether it is “worth it”—not only in terms of money, but also other economies (such as time and effort). This was recognized as a problem starting in the late eighteenth century. Once high art came into clearer focus by distinguishing itself as not popular, it followed that material profit must disqualify a work from the art world, which values only intrinsic qualities. Therefore, the only market strategy for art could be an antimarket strategy.

What Vazsonyi demonstrates brilliantly is how Wagner was able to promote and sell his work without appearing to do so. He lays out compelling evidence for his argument that “Wagner’s passionate critique of modernity did not prevent him from taking advantage of the very conditions he criticized” (185). For instance, Wagner vehemently rejected music criticism and insisted that the audience was much better off trusting their own impressions rather than being educated by experts. But Wagner’s dawning awareness of marketing opportunities included the widespread publicity possible through print media. Despite his own position that the work could speak for itself, Wagner did try to explain his work, over and over, in books, pamphlets, journal articles, short stories, program notes and more. Further, he enlisted admirers as publicity agents. They carried out media blitzes of unprecedented magnitude in the musical press at critical points in his career and allowed him to function more as the object of attention than its creator. Once plans for Bayreuth started taking concrete shape, Wagner was similarly able to distance himself from the commercial aspect of the enterprise by making a show of delegating to a PR “strategist” or “manager” (186).

Vazsonyi analyzes Wagner’s various tactics used to win over consumers by presenting himself as a “non-profit” entity offering works of intrinsic value. He also examines how Wagner constructed a way for his audience to understand themselves in a favorable light. While the goal was always to get people to “buy Wagner,” he portrayed his audience as outside the structure of a consumer society. These people were not the public at large, but were rather “friends,” who loved Wagner for his own sake and were raised to the status of an elite, “insider” group. Besides this small contingent, Wagner also characterized his audience as “Das Volk,” an all-encompassing term for the audience of the future after capitalism had been abolished.

Wagner worked hard at being both inclusive and exclusive in other ways. Vazsonyi describes how in the program notes that were part of his Beethoven Ninth Symphony “media event” in 1846, Wagner assured anyone who might be intimidated that all that was needed to understand the work was a receptive heart, but at the same time he flattered those with more cultural pretensions with a guide to the symphony based on Goethe’s *Faust*. Like other artists of his time, he had to tread a very fine line between being too difficult and too easy to understand.

Vazsonyi proposes that we acknowledge Wagner's intent to capture as large as possible a market share of the audience. Historically, such mundane motives behind the creation of high art have been anxiously played down, but Vazsonyi shows that this perspective does not necessarily require one to criticize or defend Wagner's actions. Rather, it opens up a new way of understanding the challenges Wagner faced, and for appreciating how he met them. In sum, Vazsonyi's book is evidence of the stimulating possibilities for Wagner studies that operate across disciplinary boundaries.

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“Die Entzauberung des Ostens”: Zur Wahrnehmung und Darstellung des Orients bei Hermann Hesse, Armin T. Wegner und Annemarie Schwarzenbach.
By Behrang Samsami. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2012. Pp. 431. Paper €45.00. ISBN 978-3895287992.

Scholarly interest in works of German literature depicting what Germans speakers call “der Orient” has been growing for some time. Behrang Samsami's book *“Die Entzauberung des Ostens”: Zur Wahrnehmung und Darstellung des Orients bei Hermann Hesse, Armin T. Wegner und Annemarie Schwarzenbach* adds to the growing secondary literature on this topic by focusing on three authors: Hermann Hesse, Armin T. Wegner and Annemarie Schwarzenbach. Samsami views these authors' encounters with the Middle and Far East as symptomatic of a flight from European modernity. As he argues, however, that which the authors find in the actual East is not what they expected.

Samsami begins his book with an overview of the history of European travel to the Middle and Far East, beginning with classical antiquity and continuing up to the time period during which Hesse, Wegner and Schwarzenbach traveled to the East. This history, covering sixty pages, is too long and not always on point to the topic at hand, including such subchapters as “Amerikanismus” and “Die Grand Tour” that, at best, only touch upon the topic of European travel to the East. Furthermore, such broad historic sweep in a lengthy introductory chapter is not needed when the focus in the following chapters is on three specific writers over the space of several decades. Readers wishing a more detailed history of European travel to the Middle and Far East would not turn to this book and those that read Samsami's work for insights on the three authors' works will not be interested in this excursus, either.

After this overview, Samsami turns to Hermann Hesse. Hesse is best known with respect to “der Orient” as the author of the 1922 novel *Siddhartha*. Samsami focuses, however, on lesser-known texts by Hesse relating to India: namely, the collection *Aus Indien* (1913), the eleven poems dealing with Eastern themes from the same