MUSINGS

LIFE is the interlude between creation and disintegration, during which man endeavours to establish permanency.

Art is therefore an expression of human yearning for permanency.

The subconscious knowledge that we are in a state of transition is the cause of that force which is eternally at work in a creative artist—that energy by which he seeks through his creative powers to obtain a foothold in the shifting sands of life, a crystallising into definite form of scenes, emotions, and thought. Without art these would be lost; we should have no heritage, no history.

In the present day we are witnessing a titanic struggle between rationalism and idealism. Let no one mistake rationalism for materialism. The latter appears to me to be the line of demarcation between the fullest possible *human* scope of things, and the dream or ideal which every being holds and which is beyond our reach. A materialist, therefore, is one who uses and enjoys to the full the human scope of life, yet is capable withal of having ideals; the rationalist is one whose measurements of life are stultified by theory, based solely on logic, and ending in logic.

To-day we are witnessing this struggle. Yet there is the force of creation ploughing its way through the turbulent seas of our age, irresistibly. With every fresh turn of the wheel of events, a new impression is being made on some mind. Some personality, with the powers of transmission, is storing up more and more of that force which his intellect will mould and reproduce in colour, sound, form or word.

The ideal in art is ultimate expression—that, which completing its experience in the gamut of human emotions, passes through the intellect as through a filter and is purified of all exaggerations and weaknesses while retaining the most important factors in experience and in emotion. We find in Jean Sebastian Bach the greatest example of ultimate expression, and likewise in Shakespeare. This lifts a man far beyond his fellow creatures. It enables him to speak in a language of all times for all times. This is genius. We find in other creative artists ultimate expression has only been reached in some of their works and then only in moments. In music, curiously enough, dramatic climax is quite alien and antagonistic to ultimate expression.

It would appear to belong to the category of theoretical emotions and to be adverse to human instinct and intellectual development. Many composers, as well as authors, appear to lack psychological sensitiveness in their treatment of events; they accentuate and underline the mere figureheads. Death, for instance, is a figurehead round which the great drama of life is playing. Love is a figurehead round which all the impulses and emotions of humanity are weaving our destinies. It is greatly interesting to note how marvellously proportioned and treated these figureheads are in the modern school. We take, for example, *Pelléas and Mélisande*. The drama is an undercurrent, deep, vibrant—the whole work pulsates with it! Yet love, both in the text and music, has the character of something ominous and fateful which is not due to the figurehead itself, but is a force round it! There is no climax. Death becomes something so easy, so terribly ordinary and small, that in that treatment lies the secret of real drama and ultimate expression.

Another example is to be found in Stravinsky's *Petroushka*. In the death of Petroushka the whole poignancy lies in the grotesque element, and the futility of pain beating its wings feebly, stupidly almost, against that wall of fate which encircles our small lives—these are the expressions which really count—these are what the intellect takes, moulds, masters. In inferior works of art there is a lack of the intellectual grip on these things—there is only an emotional chaos on obviously ordered lines with obvious climax, as different from human expression as photography from Nature. In small works I have come across one other perfect example of ultimate expression and that is in "Oiseaux tristes," a piano piece of Ravel's of approximately the same period as his admirable string quartet. The extraordinary harmony between his idea and the actual work is so complete, the mood so intensely real, that it is a *creation*, not a composition. These must be without doubt the greatest moments that a human being can attain.

Undoubtedly, too, Chopin wrote with this fundamental understanding and almost pre-natal experience of life.

The Chinese saying that "music is the harmony between heaven, the earth, and man" is a profound truth. There are invisible threads that bind all things together. The rationalist never knows this. The creative artist is constantly aware of it; possibly, in this consciousness lies all the intoxication and despair of the unattainable! The creation of something concrete, permanent, out of the ineffable, illusive. . . .

An interesting and entirely different example is *Carmen*. It has all the compelling force of intensely human elements. How wise, then, to create a work no bigger than a man! In that we find all our own splendid

arrogance, passions, and tumultuous feelings. It can never age!
L'homme ne change que de lit, jamais de nature !

To-day, more than ever, are we impatient over those works which seem to have been created on a basis of reasoned spirituality, measured impulses, grandiloquence and what not! These are intellectually conceived works. The intellect should not create; it should mould, correct and adjudge. When it is used as a creative factor we have possibly more defects in proportion and more insincerity than when we leave it to the emotions to create. Both of these are unsatisfactory in the results they produce if they are not working in conjunction the one with the other. For this reason oratorios, especially modern ones, are a bad influence on the music of our day; intellectually conceived, emotionally blatant. The same can be said of a great deal of Gustave Mahler's works. He conceived intellectually always, and thus he gives us vast effigies of philosophy and spiritual memorials. We bow down to him as a professor, but not as a creator. He should have left his own school before becoming a part of its system. I had the presumption, therefore, to disagree on this point with the great conductor, W. Mengelberg, as to his statement that Mahler was the modern Beethoven. Mahler's ideas were more literary than musical, and in more than one instance his texts are beyond the grasp of his creative spirit. Beethoven's chamber music alone would place him beyond Mahler's reach. When comparing composers of works of such important dimensions one is bound to admit the superiority of Hector Berlioz over them all, and the significance of the fact that harmony played no part at all in his works and that he is, for the most part, gaunt and awkward in this respect. Perhaps it is the purest music for this very reason. Where a nation is of itself inclined towards more sentimentality than sentiment students would benefit by discarding the oratorio, Mendelssohn, Wagner operas, and substitute in their place with the preludes and fugues of Bach, a great deal of Berlioz, and Czerny's exercises.

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