

Annie Yen-Ling Liu

Abstract

Although on one occasion Richard Wagner admitted to his wife Cosima that he had «stolen» from Liszt's *Dante* Symphony, he was otherwise unwilling to disclose his creative debts to Liszt. Wagner's attitude concerning influence and appropriation is indicative of the «originality paradox», a concept proposed by Thomas McFarland to describe the perpetual tension in literary culture between inescapable artistic influence and the requirement for originality. This essay proposes an interpretive model based on this «paradox» and the dynamics of conscious and unconscious production, centered on Wagner's prose writings and the thematic and formal network linking Wagner's *Parsifal* to the *Dante* Symphony and cantata *The Bells of Strasbourg Cathedral* of Liszt. In appropriating techniques and ideas from Liszt, Wagner's intention may have been to transcend as well as absorb his model. Although concealing this influence, he was also consolidating an advanced musical language that realized a communal vision of artistic progression.

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