

On the Womanly in the Human Race

By Richard Wagner

1883

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



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Table of Contents

- [About this Title](#)
- [Translator's Note.](#)
- [On the Womanly in the Human Race - \(as conclusion of "Religion and Art."\)](#)
- [Notes](#)

About this Title

Source

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By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis

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Page numbers are indicated using square brackets, like [62], while footnotes are indicated using parenthesis, like (1).

Translator's Note.

Although this fragment is not included in the *Gesammelte Schriften*, but was published in the posthumous collection of "Entwürfe" etc. (1885), it demands a place in the present volume as concluding the series of articles on Religion and Art. Destined for the *Bayreuther Blätter*, to complete that series, it was commenced two days before the master's death in Venice. The marginal notes are the author's, and appear to represent the scheme on which he worked.

On the Womanly in the Human Race

(as conclusion of "Religion and Art.")

Vendramin, 11. Feb. 1883.

IN all the treatises on the fall of human races, with which I am acquainted, I find but incidental notice given to the character of the marriage-bond and its influence upon the attributes of the species. It was with the intention of resuming this subject at greater length, that I added to my article on "[Hero-dom and Christendom](#)" the following remark: "no blaze of orders can hide the withered heart whose halting beat bewrays its issue from a union pledged without the seal of love, be it never so consanguineous."

If we pause for a moment's deep reflection, we might easily be terrified by the boundless vista opened out by such a thought. Yet, as I lately advocated our searching for the purely-Human in its agreement with the ever-Natural, mature consideration will shew us the only reasonable and luminous departure-point in the relation between man and woman, or rather, the male and female. ([1](#))

Whereas the fall of human races lies before us plain as day, we see the other animal species preserved in greatest purity, except where man has meddled in their crossing: manifestly, because they know no 'marriage of convenience' with a view to goods and property. In fact they know no marriage at all; and if it is Marriage that raises man so far above the animal world, to highest evolution of his moral faculties, it is the abuse of marriage, for quite other ends, that is the ground of our decline below the beasts.

Having thus been brought with almost startling swiftness [\[336\]](#) face to face with the sin that has dogged the progress of our civilisation, excluding us from those advantages which the beasts retain still undisfigured in their propagation, we may consider ourselves as having also reached the moral gist of our problem.

It is disclosed at once in the difference between the relation of the male to the female in animal, and in human life. However strongly the lust of the male in the highest types of beasts may be already directed to the individuality of the female, yet it only protects its mate until she is in the position to teach the young to help themselves, which she does till they can finally be left to go their way and forget the mother

also: here Nature's sole concern is with the species, and she keeps it all the purer by permitting no sexual intercourse save under influence of mutual 'heat.' Man's severance from the animal kingdom, on the other hand, might be said to have been completed by the conversion of his 'heat' into passionate affection for the Individual, where the instinct of Species, so paramount among the beasts, almost fades away before the ideal satisfaction of the being-loved by this one individual: in the woman alone, the mother, does that instinct seem to retain its sovereignty; and thus, although transfigured by his ideal love towards her individuality, she preserves a greater kinship to that nature-force than the man, whose passion now mates the fettered mother-love by turning to fidelity. Love's loyalty: marriage; (2) here dwells Man's power over Nature, and divine we call it. 'Tis the fashioner of all noble races. Their emergence from the backward lower races might easily be explained by the prevalence of monogamy over polygamy; it is certain that the noblest white race is monogamic at its first appearance in saga and history, but marches toward its downfall through polygamy with the races which it conquers. (3)

[337]

This question of Polygamy versus Monogamy thus brings us to the contact of the purely-human with the ever-natural. Superior minds have called Polygamy the more natural state, and the monogamic union a perpetual defiance of Nature. Undoubtedly, polygamous tribes stand nearer to the state of Nature, and, provided no disturbing mixtures intervene, thereby preserve their purity of type with the same success as Nature keeps her breeds of beasts unchanged. Only, a remarkable individuality the polygamous can not beget save under influence of the ideal canon of Monogamy; (4) a force which sometimes exerts its power, through passionate affection and love's loyalty, in the very harems of the Orientals. It is here that the Woman herself is raised above the natural law of sex (*das natürliche Gattungsgesetz*), to which, in the belief of even the wisest lawgivers, she remained so bound that the Buddha himself thought needful to exclude her from the possibility of saint-hood. (5) It is a beautiful feature in the legend, that shews the Perfect Overcomer prompted to admit the Woman.

Notes

1

I. 167-8n.

2

Only by such marriages could the races ennable themselves in procreation.

3

Polygamy (possession) at once among conquerors.

4

Ideality of the Man—Naturality of the Woman— —(Buddha)—now— degeneration of the man—etc.

5

However, the process of emancipation of the Woman takes place amid ecstatic throes. Love—Tragedy.

Home | Prose

