

He Set the Forest to Music

ENCHANTED WANDERER. The Life of Carl Maria von Weber. By Lucy Poate Stebbins and Richard Poate Stebbins. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1940. 345 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by PAUL HENRY LANG

IN his childhood, Weber journeyed to Salzburg and Vienna to study with the two Haydns, later consorting with Schubert, Beethoven, Rossini, Spontini, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, and toward the end of his life, young Wagner watched with admiration his efforts on behalf of German opera, while Berlioz saw in him the embodiment of romanticism. Surely a musician of acknowledged stature whose life was spent amid so brilliant and varied a musical world offers a stimulating subject for the biographer, and the authors of "Enchanted Wanderer" have met the challenge in a most rewarding manner. Unlike the ordinary run of musical biographies, this book is the result of laborious research, and this reviewer does not recall such a conscientious and painstaking essay in several years. The writing is vivid and convincing, events unfold in an effortless sequence, although here and there one is conscious of a somewhat forced novelistic tone. But the man emerges from these pages with the plasticity of a portrait.

The authors disclaim any intention of offering "a treatise on Weber's music." But is this a legitimate approach? Weber was possessed by one absorbing mission, the future of German opera, and to this end he devoted all his energies. Surely the man's portrait cannot be complete without his music, and the authors did in fact find a certain amount of musical discussion impossible to avoid. In this they were less successful than in their purely biographical efforts. The central problem, Italian versus German opera, claims recognition in every chapter. Berating the Dresden court for its preference for Italian works, they fail to take into consideration the more than a century old tradition of Italian opera in the Saxon capital (and for that matter in the other German capitals), a tradition that could not be challenged for the very good reason that until the end of the eighteenth century, German opera was practically non-existent. Everything that is here credited to Weber came from the disparaged Italian opera, "the new dramatic coloring of the orchestration, his persistent and versatile use of the leitmotif . . . his

noble characterization of women," etc. Viewed from this angle, Weber's purely musical contribution was not new and one certainly cannot call *Der Freischütz* "the first modern German opera," for it was a Singspiel pure and simple, such as were Hiller's, Mozart's and Beethoven's. The great merit of Weber's operatic works was precisely their popular nature. It was this quality, saturated with the romanticism of the German forest and fairy tale, that made them unmistakably and thoroughly German.

One wonders why, among all their sources—the bibliography in itself is a

remarkable piece of work—the authors found a few bon mots of Ernest Newman alone worth quoting, whereas the many excellent special studies devoted to Weber's music do not seem to have influenced their judgement. There are many other details, some of them technical, such as the seating of the orchestra, etc., that are open to criticism. Were it not for these shortcomings, the "Enchanted Wanderer" would have ranked as an outstanding contribution to American musical literature. As it is now, it is an uncommonly well presented serious biography, invaluable to every student of the music of early romanticism.

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Between the Musical Lines

THE CRITICAL COMPOSER. Edited by Irving Kolodin. New York: Howell-Soskin. 1940. 275 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by KATHARINE SCHERMAN

MR. KOLODIN'S book gives the interested layman a quick view of the opinions of several nineteenth-century composers on contemporary composers and the ways of audiences and conductors in the romantic period of music. It is of more interest to the layman than to a professional student of musical history and criticism, as the selections are too short and too few to give an adequate picture of the philosophy of romanticism which governed both music and criticism in this period.

The best clues to the romantic philosophy to be found in the book are the selections from the writings of Berlioz and Wagner on Beethoven. Berlioz analyzes four Beethoven symphonies—the Third, Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth. He endeavors to show how Beethoven created emotional images in music through the use of revolutionary principles of harmony. His ap-

proach is romantic in that he is interested more in the emotional effects which certain passages of the music create than in a scientific analysis of the cohesion of the whole piece, such as would be attempted by a teacher of music analysis today.

Wagner's interpretation of the music of Beethoven is a pseudo-historical one designed to illustrate the general superiority of the nineteenth century German over all musicians of another age or an alien race. Beethoven, *The German*, is extolled as the model of the romantic soul freed from the worldly chains of patronage and poverty; freed, therefore, in his music, from any trace of subordination to popular taste, frivolity, humor, or tradition. Wagner exalts Beethoven's blindness as the agent which permitted the composer to find an inner beauty and joy secure from the ugly taint of the outer world. This essentially romantic and almost religious concept of Beethoven entirely leaves out of account the frequent bitterness and carping sorrow in Beethoven's music; it also leaves out the contredanses and the popular overtures by means of which Beethoven achieved his freedom from the worldly chain of starvation. Worse than that, it assumes that because a composer like Mozart is dependent on the composition of popular dance music for his living, his music is necessarily of a lower order than that of an ugly, blind, unhappy man at odds with the rest of the world.

The book contains little real musical criticism. Mostly it is a collection of impressions—witty, romantic, and bitter, which composers have written between their intervals of composing.



How to Mark A Book

MORTIMER J. ADLER

YOU know you have to read "between the lines" to get the most out of anything. I want to persuade you to do something equally important in the course of your reading. I want to persuade you to "write between the lines." Unless you do, you are not likely to do the most efficient kind of reading.

I contend, quite bluntly, that marking up a book is not an act of mutilation but of love.

You shouldn't mark up a book which isn't yours. Librarians (or your friends) who lend you books expect you to keep them clean, and you should. If you decide that I am right about the usefulness of marking books, you will have to buy them. Most of the world's great books are available today, in reprint editions, at less than a dollar.

There are two ways in which one can own a book. The first is the property right you establish by paying for it, just as you pay for clothes and furniture. But this act of purchase is only the prelude to possession. Full ownership comes only when you have made it a part of yourself, and the best way to make yourself a part of it is by writing in it. An illustration may make the point clear. You buy a beefsteak and transfer it from the butcher's ice-box to your own. But you do not own the beefsteak in the most important sense until you consume it and get it into your bloodstream. I am arguing that books, too, must be absorbed in your bloodstream to do you any good.

Confusion about what it means to own a book leads people to a false reverence for paper, binding, and type—a respect for the physical thing—the craft of the printer rather than the genius of the author. They forget that it is possible for a man to acquire the idea, to possess the beauty, which a great book contains, without staking his claim by pasting his bookplate inside the cover. Having a fine library doesn't prove that its owner has a mind enriched by books; it proves nothing more than that he, his father, or his wife, was rich enough to buy them.

There are three kinds of book owners. The first has all the standard sets and best-sellers—unread, untouched. (This deluded individual owns wood-pulp and ink, not books.) The second has a great many books—a few of them read through, most of them

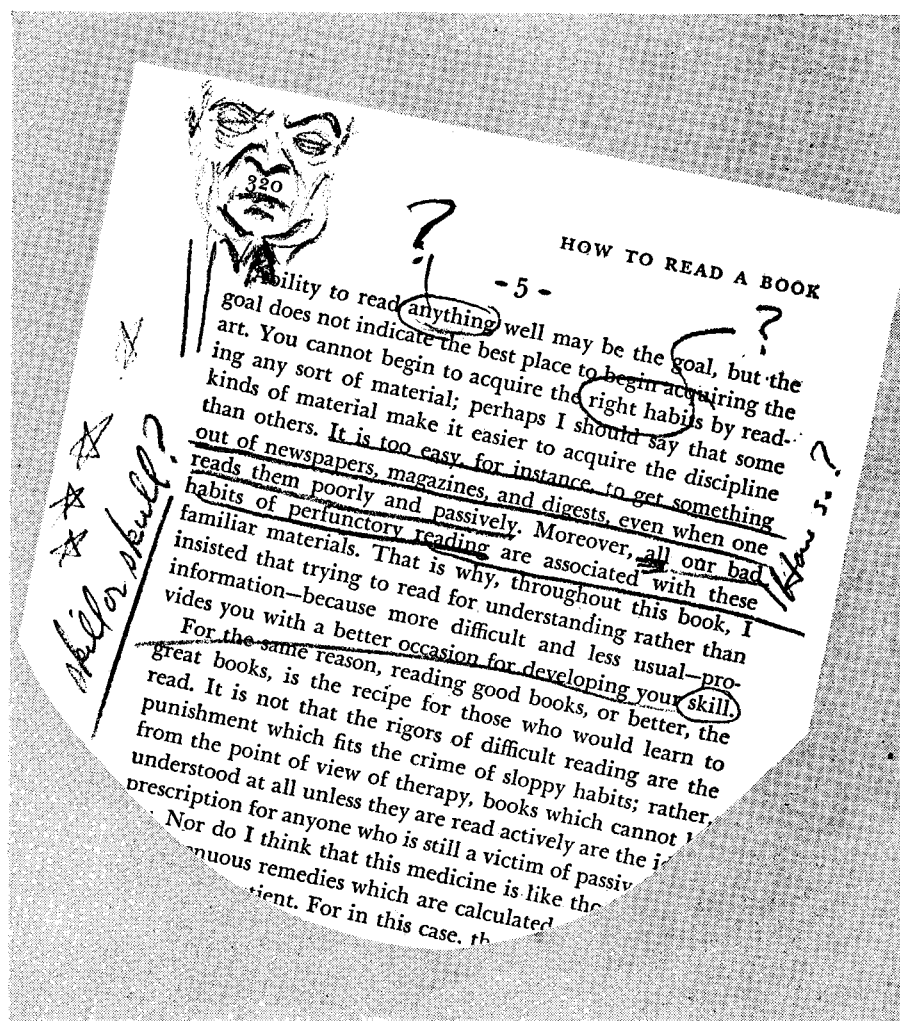
dipped into, but all of them as clean and shiny as the day they were bought. (This person would probably like to make books his own, but is restrained by a false respect for their physical appearance.) The third has a few books or many—every one of them dog-eared and dilapidated, shaken and loosened by continual use, marked and scribbled in from front to back. (This man owns books.)

Is it false respect, you may ask, to preserve intact and unblemished a beautifully printed book, an elegantly bound edition? Of course not. I'd no more scribble all over a first edition of "Paradise Lost" than I'd give my baby a set of crayons and an original

Rembrandt! I wouldn't mark up a painting or a statue. Its soul, so to speak, is inseparable from its body. And the beauty of a rare edition or of a richly manufactured volume is like that of a painting or a statue.

But the soul of a book *can* be separated from its body. A book is more like the score of a piece of music than it is like a painting. No great musician confuses a symphony with the printed sheets of music. Arturo Toscanini reveres Brahms, but Toscanini's score of the C-minor Symphony is so thoroughly marked up that no one but the maestro himself can read it. The reason why a great conductor makes notations on his musical scores—marks them up again and again each time he returns to study them—is the reason why you should mark your books. If your respect for magnificent binding or typography gets in the way, buy yourself a cheap edition and pay your respects to the author.

Why is marking up a book indispensable to reading? First, it keeps you awake. (And I don't mean merely



The SRL editors, who yield to no one their firm hold on a pencil, went back to a review copy of Mr. Adler's "How to Read a Book," and came across this page, which, while it illustrates some of the points made by Mr. Adler in his article, demonstrates that he who marks is tempted also to doodle. Perhaps, after all, this page is an example of how *not* to mark a book.