

March 7, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to bring to your attention an important and timely book on the man and the myth of Richard Wagner, “Thou Shalt Have no Other Gods Before Me.” There has yet to be a book in English that so directly and clearly confronts the dissonance between Wagner as an icon of inhumanity unique among artists, yet who is the celebrated center of an international cult still flourishing today. This explosive book therefore portends a seismic shift in our understanding of Wagner and unmasks him as the anti-Gandhi and anti-Mandela for our time. Tailored to the needs and interests of as broad as possible a reading public, this book has been produced by none other than Wagner’s own great-grandson, Gottfried. Yet this is no personal exposé or family-tell-all; Gottfried already accomplished that task years ago, and to great acclaim. His first book, “Twilight of the Wagners,” was an international bestseller that proved the great interest and viability of such a subject and audience in the international arena. This second book is instead not a memoir but a serious, thoroughly researched work of public history that chronicles Wagner as an epigone of all the worst ills of modernity. He has now authorized me as a trained historian to guide this project to translation and expansion for the English-speaking world.

Gottfried Wagner’s “Thou Shalt Have no Other Gods Before Me,” has already been published to strong press and public reception by the Ullstein Verlag in 2013. This new version and translation of the German is clearly organized into pithy and powerful chapters that thoroughly pull apart each aspect of the personality, operatic works, and career of Richard Wagner and his successors. Each chapter further frames these subjects for what they were and still represent today: the antithesis of every value enshrined in the international family of nations. In our era of refugee crises, religious conflicts, challenges to gender norms, how can any society, let alone the leading circles of Germany, continue to hallow the values of such a figure as Wagner?

The accomplishments of this book are especially crucial for an English-speaking/American audience that continues to support one of the most conservative and uncritical Wagner infrastructures in the world. Not coincidentally, this audience also remains largely unaware of the actual meaning and subtleties of much of Wagner’s work in its original language and context. Moreover, contrary to that which is commonly assumed, Jewish artists and thinkers have been at the forefront of the Wagner cult since the very beginning, which forms a surprisingly overlooked dimension of this whole phenomenon. Our English language edition will feature an expanded concluding section to illuminate precisely this issue of Wagner and his Jewish acolytes.

Finally, much more than a catalogue of iniquities about a composer well known to have inspired Hitler, Gottfried’s latest book is a meditation on the sublime aesthetics of Wagner that too often conceal a program of psychological terror and prejudice. Courageous and inspired, this book ultimately expresses new insights about the relationship between art, ethics and human rights that are perfectly in tune with critical issues today, an era in which more and more societies are rethinking the place and presence of past idols.

In the attached dossier, please find a sample translation of the introduction and a comprehensive précis of the chapters. Detailed resumes for Gottfried Wagner and myself as well as samples of critical acclaim for the European version of this text can be furnished upon request. Thank you kindly for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Adam J. Sacks, Ph.D.

Adam_Sacks@Brown.edu

(646) 416-0822

Thou Shalt Have no Other Gods Before Me: Introduction
(Translation: Adam J. Sacks)

Why am I writing a book now about my great-grandfather Richard Wagner, fifteen years after my autobiography *Twilight of the Gods*? My chronicle of 1997 was the expression of a personal decision to confront a family history that has also become a part of German history. The book I present here serves the cause of objectivity: as a music historian I now engage the theme of “Richard Wagner and the fallout from his career up to the present.”

Anyone who examines the musical wizard Richard Wagner finds himself/herself first and foremost confronted with the emotional impact of his music. He submerges the listener in a veritable roller coaster of emotion and triggers thereby extreme admiration as well as extreme aversion. But what lies hidden behind this musical ravishment? In my opinion, Wagner’s worldview that shaped his life, his writings and his opera, is irreconcilable with the foundations of any humanistic ethic. His views were defined by his racism, misogyny, nihilism and megalomania. These pillars of Wagner’s outlook on the world are the subject matter of the book at hand. I undertaken to strip back the layers of the hagiographic quagmire constructed first by the composer, thinker and politician Richard Wagner. His authoritarian, anti-democratic, racist and sexist legacy is anachronistic, inhuman and anti-European; it is a radioactive, poisonous cesspool from the past, which calls out for a responsible decontamination.

With individual free expression once again under attack in Europe, I seek to defend the principles of the open society. Therefore it is especially important to confront all the aspects of the Wagner phenomenon now two hundred years after his birth and not just enjoy his seductive

sounds. I am thinking of the next generation when I speak of Wagner: do we Europeans want to learn from history or do we continue the burden of Wagner as an eternal soap opera?

In his egotistical, destructive and misanthropic behavior and thought, Wagner is antithetical to all that makes up a humane and caring society. As a result he became the idol and catchword king of all those who led Germany and Europe on a cataclysmic path. The counterpart to Wagner's position was formulated by the philosopher Wilhelm Weischedel:

Responsibility unfolds out of itself into shared responsibility; solidarity means: to share responsibility, to work alongside others, to advocate for them, to stand by their side, and to help them. To solidarity belongs the idea that one's fellow humans are more important than one's own ego.

My critical perspective on Richard Wagner, the Bayreuth Festival and the Wagner Clan is the result of a long and intensive confrontation. I grew up in Bayreuth amidst Wagner adulation. As a child, I discovered the hidden film reels that showed my family in happy harmony with Hitler, whereupon I began to pose questions to my father- questions to which I received no reply. So I began to look for answers. Now I look back on an intensive life and thorough engagement with Wagner and the consequences that have led me to five continents as a music historian and great-grandson. It was the deep personal experiences above all that made me ever more critical. I wrote my doctorate on the Jewish composer Kurt Weill and turned my back on Bayreuth. And I met survivors of the Nazi-terror that shaped my thoughts and feelings.

“One needs a psychiatrist” [to engage with Wagner] – this was the headline to a conversation published in the *Zeit* as a kick-off to the Wagner bicentennial year of 2013 featuring the Wagner star conductor Sir Simon Rattle and Andris Nelsons. The two spoke of their experiences with the composer. Nelsons asked his colleague: “How dangerous is the pathos and intoxication unleashed by Wagner's music in moments that overcome the listener?” Rattle

answered, “The danger is well-known and has left its traces especially in German history. I do not wish to say more on this subject.” Instead he quoted another colleague, the Wagner-conductor Daniel Barenboim: “As a conductor, when it comes to Wagner, one cannot swim against the stream.” When speaking of the effects of Wagner, Barenboim asserted, “Here one is working with Plutonium and it would be advised to wear thick gloves. But it is the most magnificent plutonium of the word and one longs for direct contact and to take the gloves off.”

The discomfort (of the aforementioned) is palpable, but their enthusiasm for Wagner wraps this discomfort in silence, to which the longtime musical director of the New York Met (and Bayreuth conductor) James Levine provided a notable precedent. These conductors apparently seem to have learned much from the case of Wilhelm Furtwängler, the star conductor of the Third Reich, whose Wagner interpretation still form the template for most musicians. They would rather not pose the question of which lessons one should learn from the case of Wagner. Instead, they sugarcoat the whole subject: on the one hand there is Wagner the power seeker with his questionable world-views and on the other the divine opera composer. And the one is supposed to have nothing to do with the other - as the conductor Christian Thielemann declared – “C Major does in fact remain C Major.” The painful questions regarding the role of Wagner’s music in the Nazi state and the connection between Wagner’s racist anti-Semitism and Auschwitz are suppressed.

Richard Wagner wanted to be the greatest in the world of Music Theater; he left no doubt about that. With the Bayreuth Festival House he made a monument to himself and created a pilgrimage site for his disciples. Wagner’s Music and the festival house even today form the foundation for the flourishing business- economic, political and musical- of the Wagner Cult.

The dubiousness of the idol is therefore gladly disregarded, as the commercial value is too high. Wagner is a moneymaker, just as valuable a German export as VW or Mercedes. If he is on the program, no seat will remain empty in the opera house. Therefore one would rather not engage with the history and dark side of the Bayreuth festival and the Wagner Cult.

There are many facets to the person Richard Wagner. Behind the musical wizard and the emotional steamroller stands the charlatan, schnorrer (freeloader), schemer, phony revolutionary and opportunistic lapdog of kings and emperors. All of these aspects signal underlying character traits of Wagner: the fatherless man that knew no boundaries, the necrophile and doomsayer, the misogynist and racist, the megalomaniac who thought only of himself with every word and deed. Wagner was not simply an artist, but a politician and artist in one. His music and oeuvre had a great influence well beyond the audience of an opera house, finding resonance not least in the Nazi state. One associates his music even today with the mass marches of Nazi rallies and the bomb attacks of the Wehrmacht. Francis Ford Coppola famously made use of this connection for his Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now*. The images called up by the Wagner-Sound lead invariably to that infamous Wagnerian, Hitler. Today the Neo-Nazis avail themselves of Wagner's Music for their propaganda in the Internet. The warning that "one needs a psychiatrist" therefore does not seem a sufficient enough antidote for listening to Wagner's music.

The sophisticated opera fan is aware of the dynamite hidden within Wagner and will confess only in confidence that "but there is so much wonderful music from other composers without such compromising associations." One prefers to not say it too loud, in order not to be banished from the right circles. Wagner is a prestige article for the wealthy and powerful that pilgrimage each year to Bayreuth, feigning interest in his music. Bayreuth still promises –

despite all the talk of decline – exclusivity: the ideal place to be seen and an appropriate venue for big business dealing. Anything goes?

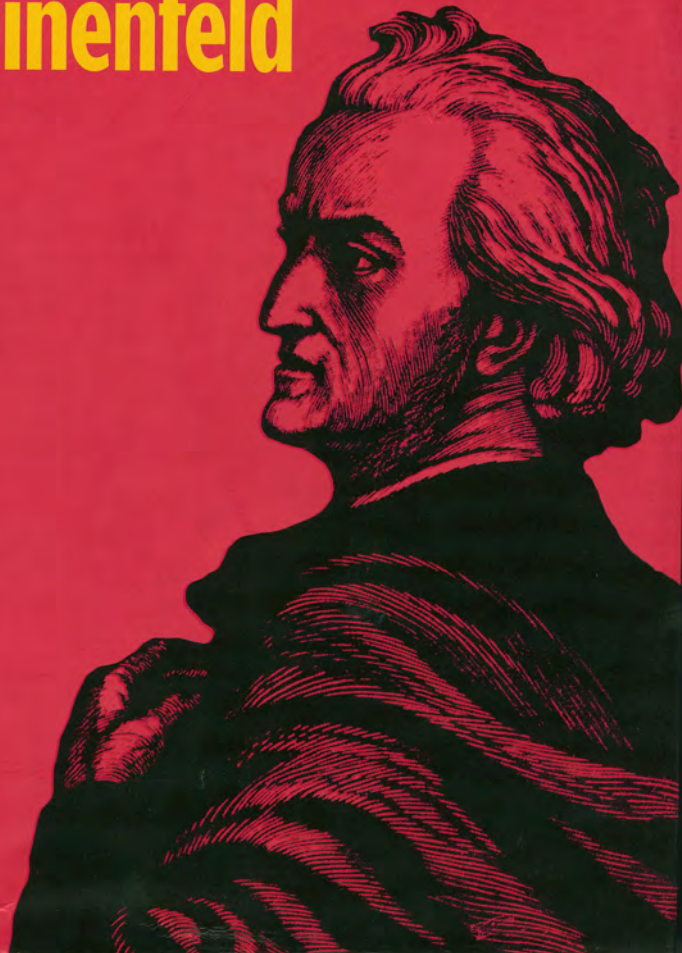
“The more I read about Richard Wagner, the harder it is for me to conduct his music,” confessed Sir Simon Rattle in the ZEIT interview referenced earlier. That is to say: the more one knows about Wagner, the more one dares to form an independent opinion, that clearly the outlines of Wagner’s disturbing world view emerge out of his operatic sound world. Richard Wagner and the international cult around him remains a ticking time bomb: Beware Richard Wagner!

Gottfried Wagner

**Du sollst keine anderen
Götter haben neben mir**

**Richard Wagner –
Ein Minenfeld**

Propyläen



No Other Gods: Chapter Summary
*(Thou Shalt Have No Gods Other Than Me
Richard Wagner – A Minefield)*



Johanna Rosine Wagner, Richard's mother. Painting by Ludwig Geyer, 1817.



Ludwig Geyer, Wagner's stepfather, possibly also his biological father.

Chapter 1: Without Fathers or Boundaries

The well-known controversy over the real identity of Wagner's father has been misunderstood. While it is true he never knew his real father, his stepfather (presumed by many to have been Jewish) died when he was 8, and that all of his heroes knew only ersatz fathers, there is little evidence Wagner was traumatized by these circumstances. Rather he compensated by launching himself into self-deification and a dream world that knew no limitations from reality. Equally disturbing was his relationship with his mother that vacillated between over-infatuation and strong feelings of neglect. Rather than understanding Wagner as a victim of his troubled family origins (as he liked to portray himself) he instead developed a gigantomaniac need for validation that could never be satisfied.



A Cry out of Swiss Exile, the essay “Music of the Future” in his jacket pocket. Caricature from *Punch* in 1866.

Chapter 2: The Dilettante and Charlatan

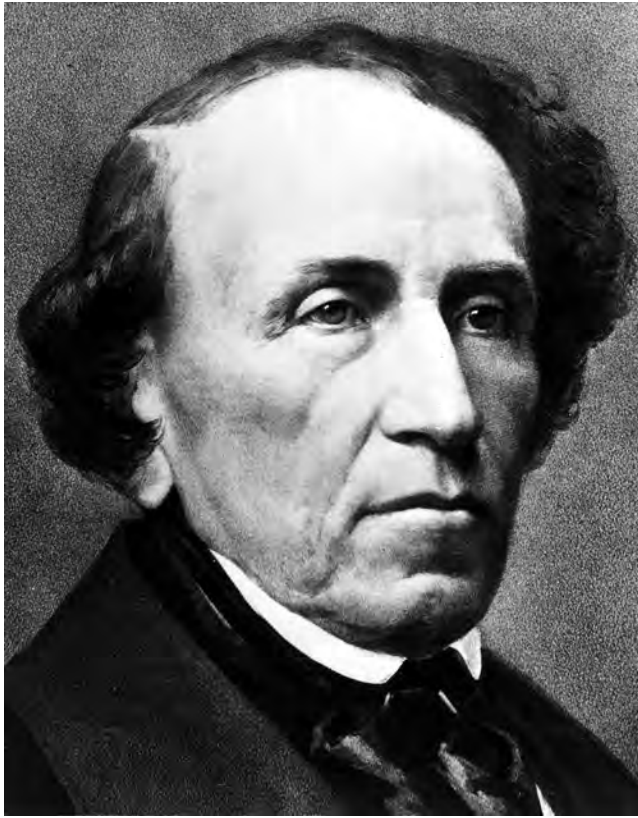
An egocentric autodidact, Wagner’s anti-authoritarian penchant brought him in and out of several schools and left him without any degree. On the other hand, he would accommodate whatever was in intellectual style to satisfy his ambitions, from leftist Hegelian revolutionary ideas of the 1840s to the racist philosophies of the 1880s, without seeking any consistency in thought or commitment. Filled with both a sense of mission and a deep inferiority complex, Wagner’s dilettantism, both musically and poetically, was shrouded in what Nietzsche called “the old German cult of obscurity.” Downplaying any influences or mentors, Wagner shamelessly embraced opera as a vehicle of the self-interest of the growing financial and cultural power of the bourgeoisie.



The Self-Dramatist. Wagner (on a stool) in a circle of friends during a New Year's Eve celebration in Paris, 1840.

Chapter 3: The Gambler and the Schnorrer

Constantly trailed by debt, Wagner was absorbed by financial gain and waste and seemed to derive pleasure by existing on the edge of ruin. Chased in his early career from one theater post to the next by creditors, the basis of so many of his closest personal relationships was financial usury accompanied by moralistic blackmail. Even when world famous and rich he was not above cajoling his infamous sponsor, Bavarian King Ludwig II to pay for his vacation villa near Naples or he would offer the same “original score” to multiple interested parties. Obsessions with silk and perfume and penchant for living akin to an “oriental grand seigneur” would provide fodder for repeated media scandals in his own lifetime. His obsession with money and materialism was deeply linked to his fixation with European Jewry as the embodiment of a “civilization of money,” and dreamed of a redemption/destruction of this world as carried out in the narrative of the Ring cycle.



Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864). Wagner scrupulously used him also, just like Liszt, for his designs.



Franz Liszt (1811-1886), Wagner's lifelong friend and patron, later his stepfather.

Chapter 4: The Careerist and Intrigant

Wagner knew only of friend or foe, and used flattery to gain access to the greatest stars of his day, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, and Liszt who he would then ruthlessly exploit, if not also abuse and then discard. He even repeatedly revealed in letters his conviction that terrorism was the only means to gain influence. He owed the entirety of his early career to Meyerbeer, a true Jewish universalist who pioneered German-French understanding. Against Meyerbeer and then also Mendelssohn (to whom Wagner lobbed the charge of superficiality) Wagner made his arguments about the fundamental foreignness of the Jew that made him a founding father of racist anti-Semitism. Such attacks also started the path to the historical marginalization of these great Jewish composers from European life. Blatant plagiarism characterized his relationship to these two composers as well as the writer Heine and his later father-in-law Franz List (the true originator of the famous "Tristan Chord.") The contemporary Wagner cult displays ample sign of continuing the depreciation of these important cultural figures, and has never offered either correction or tribute.



Wagner's first wife, Minna, who didn't suffer his moods gladly and who he then miserably mistreated. Around 1860.



Wagner with his second always devoted wife Cosima. Since she towered a head over him, she had to sit. Photo by Fritz Luckhardt, 1872.

Chapter 5: The Misogynist

Wagner was a reactionary chauvinist of the highest degree, as demonstrated above all in the willful denigration of his first wife, Minna Planer. Regarded with envy as a competitor, many now believe that almost all of his 13 “music-dramas,” should be co-credited to her. When he was finally able to release her, as he promised, from the material turbulence that afflicted most of the marriage, he cut off all relations. Wagner did not attend her funeral, and he suppressed the record of her miscarriage that left her unable to conceive. The woman who replaced Minna, Cosmia, nurtured a relationship characterized by subservience without boundary, what many have observed as outright masochism. Obsessively following his every word and utterance, she filled 5,000 pages with such records. Finally, the women in Wagner's operas were consistently passive objects in the hands of men whose greatest value came in their self-immolation. He subscribed to the ideas of racial degeneracy that held the decline of women and rise of women as its final chapter.



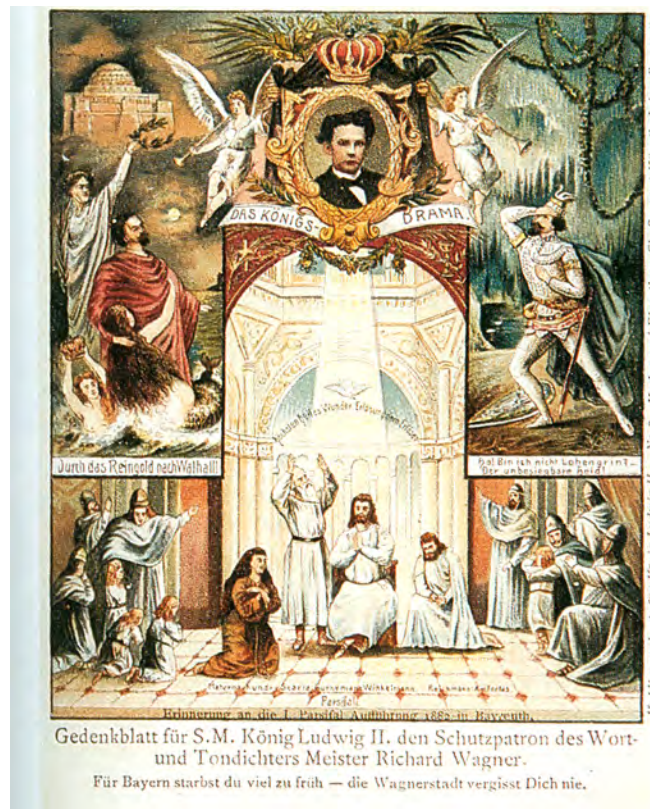
“Drown, sink, unconscious, highest pleasure!” With these words, Isolde collapses over her already dead lover Tristan – their love united in death. Drawing of Wilhelm von Kaulbach, around 1877.



After Wagner took part in the May Uprising in Dresden 1849, he fled with search notices posted for his arrest.

Chapter 6: The “Revolutionary”

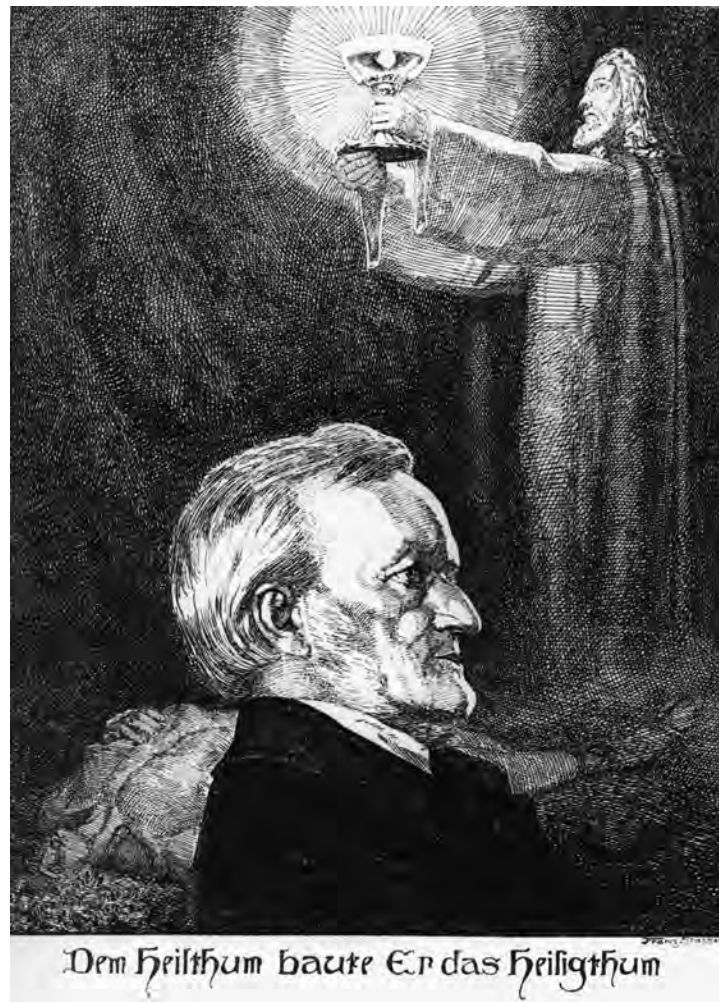
The idealized image of Wagner as a radical democrat or progressive is a wish fulfillment. More accurate is that Wagner only preferred to stay on the side of the powerful. There is no evidence he ever was a student of any of the major political thinkers of his day such as Marx or Proudhon. People who knew his library testified that never had a political book at home. Wagner’s association with the revolution of 1848 was largely due to the fact that his career had hit a dead end, and in fact right after its failure, Wagner immediately sought to ingratiate himself again with the Saxon monarch. Though perhaps interested in idea of revolution, Wagner embraced only the element of destruction not utopia, and confessed himself that his own politics amounted to nothing more than “the most bloody hate against our civilization.”



Memorial notice of “Wagner City Bayreuth” for the deceased King Ludwig II, the protective patron of Richard Wagner.

Chapter 7: The Royal Darling

Wagner’s legendary relationship with his patron Ludwig II of Bavaria reveals the composer to be nothing less than a consummate confidence trickster. He would sell the young monarchs compositions already given elsewhere, would force upon his art as the new religion of the state, all the while exploiting the latest homosexuality of his benefactor. Wagner would play act upon the fantasies of the young dreamer and indulged their secret, shared fantasy language, while denouncing Ludwig as a “cretin” behind his back. Though he proclaimed his wish that Ludwig become the harbinger of unification as king of all the Germans, once it was clear this role would fall to Prussia, Wagner wrote a *Kaisermarsch* for that one-time enemy of Bavaria. While Ludwig helped plan, pay for and save the Bayreuth theater from financial ruin, once the time came for its inauguration Wagner cynically turned to Prussian King Wilhelm II for approval as ultimate figurehead and sponsor.



“To holiness did he build a holiness” – contemporary drawing of the “Master” for the concluding scene of “Parsifal.”

Chapter 8: The Necrophiliac and Apocalypticist

The toxic essence of Wagner’s work as well as the underside of his obsession with redemption was his disgust with the world and his fetish for apocalypse. Often referring to himself as the “plenipotentiary of doom,” Wagner consistently converges death with aesthetic pleasure. On intimate terms with the death drive and often prone to thoughts of suicide, in his first artistic venture, an adolescent five-act called *Leubald and Adelaide*, forty-two people die in the course of the action. Wagner even more strongly identified with the characters in his *Ring* cycle who invariably meet death by fire as the entire proceedings cease with an on-stage apocalypse, a “twilight of the gods.” By no means limited to the realm of fantasy, Wagner declared war on other theaters and even cities, hoping for their destruction as he famously declaimed to believe in “no other revolution than that which begins with the burning down of Paris.”



Contemporary caricature of the Viennese satirical paper, *Der Floh* from 1869 that plays upon Wagner's anti-Semitism and his alleged Jewish origins.

Chapter 9: The Racial Anti-Semite

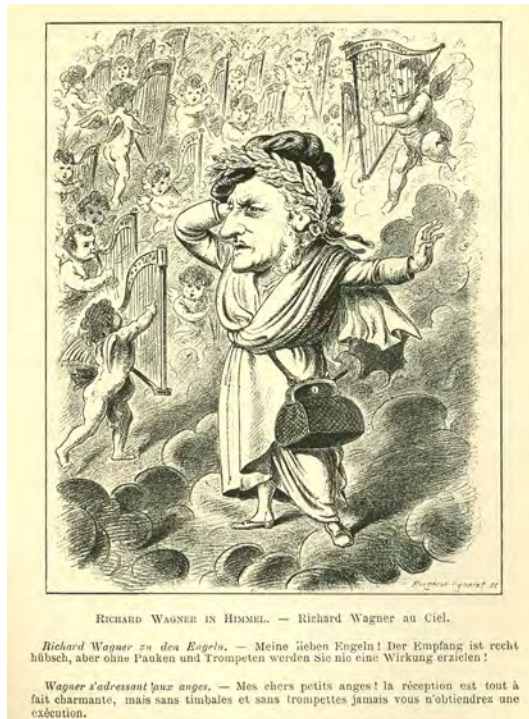
Though Wagner's anti-Semitism can hardly be ignored, apologists have tended to underplay this element by reference to the general atmosphere or by reducing it to foul utterances of little practical consequence. The claim that Wagner's prejudice left no traces in his work itself is countered by the reality that his convictions on the matter were not only not superficial but formed the aggressive core of his world view. As he put it himself, his resentment against the Jews was so central to his nature as "blood to gall." There is support for the claim that Wagner was a principal founder of an ideology (as he at times fancied himself) that always including an element of exterminatory thinking and ultimately led to genocide. Believing early in his life that modern art was corrupted by Jewry as such and not just individual Jews, Wagner's call for "self-annihilation," was not meant merely symbolically as he favored deportation. Taken in by the racist blood theory of Gobineau later in life, Wagner believed in a kind of German mission to remove the Jews. Obscuring this reality is the Bayreuth tradition of Jewish alibi speakers, one that continues unabated to the present day.



Master of the Senses. Contemporary Wagner caricature from the French satirical newspaper *L'Éclipse*.

Chapter 10: The Music Magician and the Overbore

Referred to even in its own time as the “Wagner drug,” the effects of his music to cloud judgment were self-consciously programmatic. The special effects for which Wagner is rightly celebrated were not playful after thought but rather developed to serve his ideological and political goals. Rather than seeking a separation between ideology and art, Wagner’s music served to help in the digestion of his otherwise troubling messages. Wagner’s system of “*leitmotif*” was actually a thought out manipulation of emotions by directly guiding the listener. Reports of assaults on the senses are legion from convulsions and crying at *Tristan* to the manipulative church music of *Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* and finally the build up to aesthetic apocalypse in the *Ring*. Wagner himself began the process of detaching his music from the opera stage for other uses, by presenting and commodifying his own greatest hits.



“Ascension into Heaven” – Caricature from the Viennese satirical newspaper *Kikeriki* on the occasion of Wagner’s death in 1883.



“Hojotoho!” – contemporary greeting card from the “Wagnerhort” Bayreuth with the cry of the Valkyries.

Chapter 11: Self-Deification

Wagner posed as an evangelical messenger whose redemptory message was himself. Capable of almost only speaking of himself, he made his own temple in Bayreuth where he crowned himself king. Astoundingly, real life monarchs did in fact pilgrimage to this site, while Wagner in turn imagined a full court with every possible position. Self-celebration was ever the order of the day with multiple busts adorning the grounds festooned with balloons.



“Birthday of the Führer” – the Portal of the Bayreuth Festival House on the 20th of April 1939, Hitler’s 50th Birthday.

Chapter 12: From Redemption & Co. to Temple of Genocide

Though Wagner left behind no specific wishes for succession, his much younger widow Cosima aggressively took charge. Systematically destroying much of the archive and excommunicating her own daughters (including one suffering fatally from TB), Cosima presided over the Bayreuth of the proto-fascist *Bayreuther Blätter* complete with an anti-Semitic house philosopher in Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Continuing the glorification of war started by Wagner himself, this period forms the connective link between Wagner and the Nazi party whose regime would directly fund the festival. With Wagner relatives in the SS and working at concentration camps, the bridge from the imaginary world of Wagner and the torrid Nazi reality becomes self-evident.



The Grandsons. Wolfgang and Wieland Wagner in 1948 in front of the bombed *Haus Wahnfried* in Bayreuth.

Chapter 13: New Bayreuth and Deceptive Branding:

The repression, whitewashing and falsification characteristic of the Bayreuth Festival in recent years has become legally enshrined in its complex governing structures with which the German Federal and Bavarian State government remain openly complicit. Any hope for a penitent rebirth with a figure like Thomas Mann at the helm was soon eclipsed by a canny strategy of obfuscation that used the cover of modernism and even Jewish intellectuals to perpetuate the old myths. Such a cover was simultaneous to Winifried Wagner's use of Bayreuth as a kind of gathering house for the most prominent of the (neo) Nazi scene. Despite pretenses to transparency, the centerpiece of the Wagner archive remains buried: the numerous letters and gifts from Hitler personally. Unlike so many other German cultural greats such as Beethoven, the Nazis did not *misuse* Wagner; rather they found a fruitful soil and even willing partners for their program of chauvinism and racism.



Bayreuth: still a pilgrimage site. Even today the powerful and the beautiful are drawn into the festival haus of the "master." Chancellor Merkel with Katharina and Eva Wagner.