

Gottfried Wagner
Thou shalt have no other gods than me
Richard Wagner – a minefield



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WHY NOT TALK OPENLY ABOUT RICHARD WAGNER?

Why, fifteen years after my autobiography “*He who does not howl with the Wolf: The Wagner Legacy*” am I now writing a book about Richard Wagner, my great-grandfather? My notes from 1997 were an expression of my decision to confront my family history, which has become part of German history. My new book is intended to be an objective analysis of the composer rather than a personal account of how my life was affected by my family legacy. With it, I should like to confront the subject of “Richard Wagner” objectively and to examine the repercussions of his legacy which persist to this day.

Anyone who deals with the music magician Richard Wagner is confronted first and foremost with the emotional impact of his music. Like hardly any other composer, he immerses his listeners in veritable rollercoasters of emotions, triggering both extreme admiration and extreme aversion. But what is behind this musical overwhelming? In my opinion, Wagner's world view, which shaped his life, his writings and his operas, is incompatible with the principles of ethical human behaviour. It is determined by racism, misogyny, narcissism and the negation of life. These pillars of Wagner's world view are the subject of this book: it attempts to clear away the morass of the history reception as a composer, thinker and politician.

His authoritarian and- antidemocratic, racist and misogynist legacy is anachronistic, inhumane and anti-European: a glittering but poisonous cupboard from the past that must be responsibly disposed of. I am concerned with defending the principles of an open society with individual freedom of expression, which is once again in retreat in Europe today. This is precisely why it is so important in the Wagner Jubilee Year 2013 to deal with Richard Wagner as a whole and not just with his seductive sound. I think of future generations when I talk about Wagner: do we Europeans want to learn from history through the example of Richard Wagner, an eternal soap opera?

In his selfish, destructive, inhumane behavior and thinking, Wagner stands in stark contrast to everything which constitutes a solid human society. As the philosopher Wilhelm Weischedel expounded: "Responsibility inevitably develops into shared responsibility; but to be in solidarity means to be co-responsible, to make common cause with others, to stand up for them, to stand by their side, to help them. Solidarity also means that one must put oneself aside and recognise that one's fellow human beings are more important than one's own ego. " [1]

My critical view of Richard Wagner, the Bayreuth Festival and the Wagner clan is the result of a long, intensive debate. I grew up in Bayreuth with Wagner incense. As a youngster, I discovered film reels hidden in the BMW side-car of my father, Wolfgang Wagner, which showed my family in happy unity with Adolf Hitler, and I began to ask my father questions - questions to which I received no answers. So I began to search for answers myself. Today I look back on a life which has been dominated by my struggle to come to terms with Richard Wagner and his legacy and which has taken me to five continents not only as a Wagner family member and great-grandson of the composer but also as a music historian.

It was above all the deep personal experiences of my youth that made me become more and more critical. I wrote my doctorate on the Jewish composer Kurt Weill and turned my back on Bayreuth. I met survivors of Nazi terror who shaped my thinking and feelings.

"You need a psychiatrist" – this was the title of an insightful interview with the Wagner star conductors Sir Simon Rattle and Andris Nelsons that appeared in DIE ZEIT at the start of the Wagner year 2013. [2] They spoke about their experiences with the composer. Nelsons asked his colleague: "How dangerous is the overwhelming moment in Wagner's music, its pathos, the intoxication it can unleash?" Rattle replied: "The danger is well known and has left its mark especially on German history. I don't want to say any more on this subject." Instead he quoted another colleague, Wagner conductor Daniel Barenboim, who said: "With Wagner, you can't swim against the tide."

Asked about Wagner's effect, he explained: "You're dealing with plutonium here, and it would be good to wear thick gloves, but since it's the most glorious plutonium in the world you just want direct contact and to take off all your gloves. "

This discomfort is palpable, but out of enthusiasm for Wagner's music, people prefer to keep quiet, as did the long-time music director of the New York Met and one-time Bayreuth conductor, James Levine. Obviously, few have learned anything from the case of Wilhelm Furtwängler, the former star conductor of the Third Reich, whose interpretations of Wagner are still relied upon by

many important musicians today. They don't want to face the question of what lessons can be learned. Instead, people prefer to overlook the incongruity of lauding Wagner the divine composer whilst ignoring his obnoxious world view. One is supposed to have nothing to do with the other, because, as the conductor Christian Thielemann explained, "C major remains C major." [3] The painful questions about the role of Wagner's music in the Nazi state and the connection between Richard Wagner's racial anti-semitism and Auschwitz are suppressed.

Richard Wagner never left any doubt that he wanted to be the greatest in the world of music theatre. With the Bayreuth Festival Theatre he created a monument to himself and a place of pilgrimage for his disciples. Wagner's music and the Festspielhaus together provide the foundation for a Wagner cult business that flourishes to this day, musically, politically and economically. The ethical dubiety of the idol is therefore gladly put aside: the marketing value is too high. Wagner is a bestseller, as valuable an export as VW or Mercedes. Once he is on the programme, no chair in the opera house remains empty. That's why people don't want to deal with the history and the dark side of the Bayreuth Festival and the Wagner cult.

There are many facets to the person of Richard Wagner. Behind the overwhelming and magical musician stands the charlatan, the scrounger, schemer, revolutionary and opportunistic king's favourite. All of these attributes help explain the deeply-entrenched characteristics of Wagner's personality: the fatherless and boundless, the necrophiliac and apocalyptic, the misogynist and racial anti-Semite, the self-idoliser who thought only of himself in everything he said and did. Wagner was not simply an artist, but a politician and artist in one person. His music and his works have had a great influence far beyond the opera public, not least in the propaganda of the Nazi state. To this day, people associate this music with the Nazi marches at Third Reich rallies and with the bombing raids of the Wehrmacht. As is well known, Francis Ford Coppola used this legacy for his film about the Vietnam War, *Apocalypse Now*. The images evoked by the Wagner sound inevitably lead to the Wagnerian Hitler.

Today the neo-Nazis use Wagner's music for their propaganda on the internet. You won't get far here by saying that with Wagner you need a psychiatrist. The educated opera fan knows the explosive potential of his music and, after enduring a lengthy Wagner opera, may admit in private: "There is so much beautiful music without the pitfalls of other composers...", but will hesitate to say this out loud lest he be confused with the powerful who make the annual pilgrimage to Bayreuth for reasons of prestige and who only pretend to be interested in his music. Despite all the talk of its decline, Bayreuth still promises exclusivity: the right place to be seen and a good place to do business. Anything goes?

"The more I read about Richard Wagner, the harder it is for me to perform his music," Sir Simon Rattle confessed in the *DIE ZEIT* interview mentioned above. But this also means that the more one knows about Wagner and the more one has the courage to form one's own opinion, the more clearly Wagner's bleak world view takes shape in his operatic sound worlds. Richard Wagner and the international cult around him remain a ticking bomb. Cave Richard Wagner!

Gottfried Wagner, March 2013

Gottfried H. Wagner

The Racial Anti-Semite 9th Chapter

Du sollst keine anderen Götter haben neben mir Richard Wagner - Ein Minenfeld

Gottfried H. Wagner

Chapter 9

The Racial Anti-Semite

translated from the German by Robert J.G. Chalmers

One would think that even the most ardent Wagnerians would be unable to avoid Wagner's antisemitism: it is so clear. And yet, to this day, leading German Wagner apologists, from Manfred Eger and Sven Friedrich to Joachim Kaiser, Dieter Borchmeyer and Christian Thielemann, continue to deny its existence, or where this is not possible, downplay it, excuse it or even ignore it altogether. In so doing, they use recurring patterns of argument: Wagner's antisemitism was merely a matter of isolated "bad remarks", "bad jokes" and "faux pas". Wagner lived within a culture of general "hostility towards Jews", as was to be found among many Germans - from Luther to Kant and Karl Marx. Even his pamphlet *Das Judenthum in der Musik* was no more than an "intellectual proclamation" without practical consequences for Wagner's own life, as instanced by his "many Jewish friends" and the financial support he received from Jews. Above all they make the mantra-like assertion that Wagner had kept his musical work completely free of "anti-Jewish traces". Whoever cannot agree with them is denounced as a "blind zealot" and "destructive ignoramus" or even as a slobbering "rapist" of Wagner's work.

"In principle, Political Correctness interests me little," the conductor Christian Thielemann coquettishly declares in his 2016 book, *My Life with Wagner*. This is not, however, about Political Correctness but about the development of an antisemitic racist ideology, which led to a barbaric crime, the ethnically-targeted industrial extermination of six million Jews, planned and executed by Germans. "Wagnerian antisemitism", wrote Theodor W. Adorno as early as 1952, "incorporates all the ingredients of the latter. He had already even conceived the idea of extermination of the Jews. His later ideological pronouncements differ only in that he then equated annihilation with salvation. Wagner's antisemitism is no mere peripheral matter: it is the aggressive kernel of his worldview. As such it is also recognisable in his stage works, above all in the *Meistersinger* and the *Ring of the Nibelungen*. In his later years, influenced by the French diplomat and author Arthur de Gobineau, he developed his racist antisemitism into a racist blood ideology as exemplified in his opera *Parsifal*."

Wagner's first antisemitic statements can be dated to his time in Paris at the beginning of the 1840s. In a letter to Theodor Apel in March 1842, he wrote of "accursed Jewish excrement" in relation to his creditors. His openly antisemitic career, began with the aforementioned hate pamphlet *Das Judenthum in der Musik* ("Judaism in Music"), which he published in September 1850 under the name K. Freigedank (Freethought). He told Liszt about his use of a pseudonym as follows: "Not out of fear, but in order to avoid being dragged into the overtly personal by the Jews, I used a pseudonym. I have harboured a longstanding grudge against Jewish commerce and this grudge is as necessary to my nature as bile is to blood."

The essay *Das Judenthum in der Musik* is Wagner's reckoning with Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn and Heine, but it cannot be reduced merely to that. In it, he held that there had been a "Jewification of

modern art" and at the same time denied that Jews could possess any talent in the creative arts, whether as composers and musicians or as poets or actors: "We cannot imagine any ancient or modern character, be it hero or lover, being portrayed on stage by a Jew without involuntarily feeling how ridiculously unsuitable such a portrayal would be. This is very important: a person who by the very nature of his ethnic origin is incapable of portraying this or that character cannot be considered capable of any form of artistic expression either."

In his fundamental study of Wagner's *Juden-Aufsatz*, Jens Malte Fischer has pointed out that his language goes far beyond what one could otherwise read in antisemitic texts of the time in their extremeness and crudeness. Again and again Wagner emphasised the irrevocable differences between Jews and non-Jews: "the involuntary repulsiveness that the personality and nature of the Jews has for us", and "the peculiarity of Jewish nature that is repugnant to us". According to Fischer, Wagner was postulating "an entity he called 'Jewish being' or 'Jewish nature', which was independent of history and religion", the gist of this implying that Jews remain Jews and that this reality cannot be annulled even by baptism. Wagner is thus already using "proto-racist" language in his diatribe.

Wagner's essay ends with a passage on the possibility of the Jews' "redemption" from their Jewishness, which would have to cost them "sweat, hardship, anguish and a wealth of suffering and pain", together with an appeal to the Jews to commit self-annihilation: "Participate wholeheartedly in this self-destructive, bloody struggle, and we shall be united and inseparable! But bear in mind that only one thing is at stake: your redemption from the curse of *Ahasver*: Extermination!". There has been much discussion about the impassioned and apocalyptic conclusion of the essay. Wagner's apologists have not wanted to understand in it a call to physical self-destruction, but merely a "symbolic act". In the obscure, cryptic words of Dieter Borchmeyer: "There can be no doubt that this quasi-mystical transubstantiation of the Jew, which will take place beyond all known historical or social experience, is nothing other than the effect of the unnamed work of art of the future."

It is clear from the circumstances of the re-publication of the essay in 1869 - this time under his own name and as a stand-alone pamphlet - that for Wagner the idea of extermination was much more than a "symbolic act". Under the heading *Aufklärungen über das Judenthum in der Musik* (Clarifications about Judaism in Music), he added his version of the history of the pamphlet's impact - a telling document of his conspiracy paranoia. In order to punish him for his essay, he said, they simply ignored him, his operas and his writings: "The systematic slander and persecution directed at me concerning these matters, with total avoidance of discussion of the unpleasant question of Judaism, has resulted in any case in its intended effect of punishing me." And he added a nasty remark insinuating the need for a violent solution to the "Jewish question": "Whether the decay of our culture could be stopped by a violent expulsion of the corrosive foreign element [Judaism], I am not in a position to judge, because this would require forces, the availability of which I am unaware." The militant antisemite Cosima Wagner certainly recognised the explosiveness of this remark very well: "R. is working on his article unexpectedly seriously and concluding it in magnificently damning fashion. This demonstrates again how he takes everything to heart and how he can never avoid fully explaining a matter, however shocking it is, even if nobody notices its significance."

When Wagner published his diatribe in 1850 under the pseudonym K. Freigedank in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, it had little effect. The magazine's circulation was between 1,500 and 2,000 copies and Wagner was then a failed Kapellmeister in exile in Switzerland and wanted by the authorities. Nineteen years later, when the pamphlet was reissued, things were completely different. Now Wagner

was the court composer of the Bavarian king, and the publication was understood for what it was: a slap in the face directed against the progressive emancipation of the Jews, which had led, among other things, to the Jews being given equal legal status in the North German Confederation in 1867. Wagner's confidants such as Franz Liszt were appalled by his actions, and public outrage was almost unanimous. In Mannheim, the performance of *Die Meistersinger* was vociferously booed and was soon followed by numerous counter-pamphlets. The journal *Der Israelit*, the leading organ of German-Jewish Orthodoxy, reacted with sarcasm in an editorial in April 1869:

"We few Jews - scarcely one for every hundred Germans in Germany - are claimed to have judaised science, judaised literature, the daily press, art, taste, in short, everything, everything! We are, it is claimed, the creditors of kings, we control the market and industry, the stock exchange and the theatre! [...] And we are supposed to have made all this possible [...] in the few years that the ghetti have been opened and we have been allowed to become actively involved in the arts and sciences!

[...] One hears and is amazed! Nineteen years ago, Herr Wagner had an antisemitic article published in a little known newspaper using a pseudonym; nobody had divulged the author's true identity but nevertheless Herr Wagner was subjected to the revenge of the Jews as the result of its publication. The consequences of this were that his operas were unsuccessful, his ideas were poorly received and his supporters were alienated from him. Germany would have lain at the feet of the great composer, France and England would have paid homage to him but the nemesis resulting from his anti-Jewish article pursued him everywhere. [...] Have we then mistakenly suggested that Wagner's article makes little more than a truly pleasant, refreshing and delightful impression? For the famous composer recognises the power, influence and splendid abilities of the Jewish race as no one else before him, in a manner which not even the most enthusiastic eulogist could equal, and we are perfectly justified in smiling pityingly at the miserable invective and poisonous envy contained in the present article."

Despite the initial almost unanimous rejection, the repercussions of Wagner's pamphlet on the Jews was to prove fatal, for in the following decades it became a "central text of European antisemitism". The leaders of the antisemitic movement from Bernhard Förster to Eugen Dühring invoked it, as did the notorious Berlin Court preacher, Adolf Stoecker. Ten years after its republication Cosima could proudly note in her diary: "I read a very good speech by Pastor Stoecker about Judaism. R. is for full deportation. We laugh about the fact that it was really, or so it seems, his article about the Jews which started this campaign."

The thesis propagated by Wagner that Jews lacked all feeling for art later became a central component of the antisemitic ideology of National Socialism. When Hitler went to the Munich Hofbräuhaus to agitate against the planned Festival being directed by Max Reinhardt, he used phrases taken word for word from Wagner's pamphlet. The text used for the National Socialist Exhibition "*Entartete Musik*" (Degenerate music) in Düsseldorf in 1938 was likewise largely taken from it, in particular the defamation of the music of Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn, the devastating effects of which lasted long after the end of the Nazi period.

How obsessed Wagner was with his crusade against Judaism is revealed in the diaries of his wife, Cosima. In *Das Judentum in der Musik*, Jews were likened to worms which decompose the living organism and turn it into a worm-eaten corpse. Such comparisons and ones like it pop up repeatedly in the diaries. In July 1881 Cosima noted: "R. had a somewhat restless night. First he dreamed that I did not love him, then that he was surrounded by Jews which then turned into worms." And in January 1879: "...Quite strange things are happening, heroic beings in nature have to perish, humans and animals alike, only rats and mice remain – the Jews". The Jews exist "purely to infest the bodies of others like parasitic worms", he raged a few months later. Chloral, which he had been prescribed by his doctors for rosacea, he described as Jewish corrosive ("Juden-Beize") and in another diary entry Cosima wrote: "R. would like all Jews to fall from him like warts, against which no treatment works." It is imagery which was later used in the Nazi smear paper *Der Stürmer* and in Nazi propaganda films such as *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew).

In August 1881 Cosima noted in her diary: "An article about demonstrations against Jews prompts him to say: 'That's the only thing to be done, throw the rabble out and beat them up.' " On the 18th December of the same year she recorded what Wagner told her in response to the fire in the Ringtheater in Vienna ten days earlier at which several hundred theatre-goers lost their lives: "He said, joking heartily, all Jews should be burned to death in a performance of *Nathan*." Bayreuth apologists have tried to excuse this quote, which counts amongst the most repugnant of Wagner's utterances, by claiming that he was always prone to uncontrolled outbursts which he would often later regret. There is, however, absolutely no evidence that Wagner ever showed any regret for such inflammatory antisemitic remarks, quite the opposite.

Along with his hatred for the French and his growing nationalism, his antisemitic paranoia developed into an ever more aggressive ideology: Judaism now stood for all those forces which supposedly threatened Germanness, German values and the existence of the German state and, if not counteracted, would threaten their disintegration, as portrayed in his verse *Des Deutschen Vaterland* (The Homeland of the Germans):

<i>Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?</i>	<i>(What is the German Fatherland?)</i>
<i>Ist's Nibelheim, Krähwinkelland?</i>	<i>(Is it Nibelheim*, Krähwinkelland?)**</i>
<i>Ist's wo der Jud' sich mausig macht?</i>	<i>(Is it where the Jew gets cocky?)</i>
<i>Der Lump sich kühn ins Fäustchen lacht?</i>	<i>(Where the rascal laughs in his face?)</i>

*mythical home of dwarfs **provincial backwater

The historian Ernst Hanisch, in an illuminating study of Wagner's political and ideological impact, pointed out the numerous examples in his writings where Wagner dichotomised matters as either "German" or "Un-German". Under "German" stood concepts such as provincial, culture, introspection, authority, idealism, profundity, originality and creativeness. Un-German on the other hand included metropolitan, civilisation, outwardness, democracy, materialism, abstractedness, imitation and exploitation. "All these negative and "Un-German" characteristics were then unified in a hate figure, the Jew."

Wagner's hatred of the Jews was further increased towards the end of his life when he met Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau in Rome in 1876, the year of the first Bayreuth Festival. With the latter's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Essay on the inequality of human races), first printed in 1853 but revised and expanded in 1855, de Gobineau is regarded as the founder of modern racism. They met again in Venice in 1881 and in the two following years Gobineau spent several weeks in Bayreuth. It was from him that Wagner took up the idea of the Aryan race and its decline due to interbreeding and then merged this with his antisemitism. In April 1877 Cosima reported that Wagner had had an argument "about the Jews" with the Bayreuth Dean, Dittmar. "The Dean said that mixed marriages were the solution for the problem. R. asserted: 'Then there would be no more Germans - German blond blood is not strong enough to withstand this mixing, we see how the Normans and the Franks have become Frenchmen, and Jewish blood is even more corrosive than the Romance.' "

In his essay *Erkenne dich selbst* ("Recognise yourself") published in 1881, Wagner led a further open attack on the Jewish emancipation movement based on so-called racial theory. He condemned the "entitlement given to Jews to be regarded in every imaginable respect as German, rather like the blanket authorisation given to blacks in Mexico to be considered white - Jewry is in no way a religious community but instead a racial grouping: "...the most astonishing example of racial consistency which world history has ever produced: without a homeland, without mother tongue, the Jew is guided by a firm instinct for his absolute and ineradicable uniqueness and by an unerring ability to recognise this. Not even ethnic mixing damages him: a Jew, whether male or female, may mix with the most alien of races but his Jewish roots always come to light again."

From this threat to the purity of the Aryan race follows an appeal for a "große Lösung" (great solution) of the Jewish question, to which it is specifically the Germans who are called:

"What conservatives, liberals and liberal conservatives or, at the end of the day, democrats and socialists, or also social democrats and the like, have currently proposed for the Jewish question must seem to us rather arrogant. [...] Belonging to none of those parties and seeking salvation purely by developing an awareness of man's simple and sacred dignity, we can only watch the twitchings of the dreamers and, having been barred from these parties as worthless, must just watch, even though we are worried by all of this, as none of our appeals can be heard. [...] But once the demon that keeps those frenzied people among us embroiled in the madness of the party struggle around them is no longer able to find a "where" and "when" for his salvation there will no longer be a Jew either. Precisely because of the current circumstances and conceivable only by us and our movement, we Germans could then make this great solution possible sooner than any other nation, so long as we implement it right to the innermost core of our being."

How this "great solution" of the "Jewish Question" should be solved, a matter which the Reichstag parties under the leadership of the German nation were unable to achieve, Wagner obviously left to the imagination of his readers. Whoever is familiar with the antisemitic comments in Cosima's diaries can come to their own conclusion.

But how does this relate to Wagner's musical creations? Can it really be that his operas remained completely untainted by the fanatical antisemitism of their creator? The British Wagner expert, Barry Millington, has rightly pointed out how mistaken the notion that: "Wagner's antisemitism is a bit like a shell, which can be peeled away from his works without leaving any trace. In reality it is intrinsic to his aesthetic in such a way that it is no exaggeration to say that Wagner would not have become the composer that he was, and his works would have taken on a different form". But to this day German Wagner apologists stubbornly close their eyes and ears to this reality as is exemplified by Christian Thielemann, who has stated that: "Even avowed enemies of Wagner have to this day owed the world conclusive proof that Beckmesser in the *Meistersinger*, Kundry in *Parsifal*, or Alberich and Mime in the *Ring* are malicious caricatures of the eternal Jew." It is to the great credit of British and American Wagner scholarship - from the work of Robert W. Gutman and Barry Millington to the enlightening studies of Paul Lawrence Rose and Marc A. Weiner - that they have demonstrated in detail the intertwining of antisemitic ideology and Wagner's musical works, whereas the vast majority of German scholars gave this subject a wide berth until the 1980s.

Things are, however, now out in the open. "I can't believe that people say there is no antisemitism in Wagner's works", declared the opera director Barrie Kosky on the occasion of the Berlin exhibition: *Wagner 2013*. "It is so clear and unequivocal in the operas that it is a blatant lie to claim that." Anyone who listens attentively to the *Ring of the Nibelungen* and has read Wagner's essay, *Das Judentum in der Musik* (Judaism in Music), will realise that the character of Mime and the music associated with him corresponds with the caricature which Wagner propagated in his antisemitic pamphlet. He should sing, as directed in Wagner's score, "harshly and pitifully screeching, corresponding to the Jewish manner of speaking and singing, with a shrill, hissing, buzzing and bodged sound."

It is exactly the same with Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*. Wagner allocates the part quite deliberately to a bass voice, although it is pitched for a baritone. This comic character role is in no way comparable to a traditional basso buffo part, he explained to the singer who took the role of Beckmesser at the Munich premiere, Gustav Hölzel: "The high pitch results in a passionate, screeching sound, which should be brought out to the full." Beckmessers shrill, melismatic second act serenade is based on the melismas [...] of synagogue singing", which Wagner denounced in *Judaism in Music* as "mind and sense bewildering gurgling, warbling and babbling". The crowd in *Die Meistersinger* reacts to this with corresponding revulsion.

<i>Wer heult den da? Wer kreischt mit Macht?</i>	<i>(Who is that howling? Who is it powerfully screeching?)</i>
<i>Ist das erlaubt so spät zur Nacht?--</i>	<i>(Is that allowed so late at night?--)</i>
<i>Gebt Ruhe hier! 's ist Schlafenszeit!</i>	<i>(Give us peace! It's past bedtime!)</i>
<i>Mein, hört nur, wie der Esel schreit!</i>	<i>(Just listen to the donkey braying!)</i>
<i>Ihr da! Seid still, und scheert euch fort!</i>	<i>(You there! Shut up and scarper!)</i>
<i>Heult, kreischt und schreit an and'rem Ort</i>	<i>(Howl, screech and scream elsewhere!)</i>

As a "reward" for his song the people then go after him with cudgels and smash his lute. In everything that the town clerk Beckmesser does, he conforms to Wagner's cliché of the inartistic Jew, and for this he is put on "trial" on stage. He joins the ranks of cultural vandals and imitators incapable of genuine art, as Wagner designated Jewish composers. Viewed in this way, remarked the

musicologist Ulrich Drüner, "Beckmesser is a wildly overexaggerated caricature of Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn and Heine". In the third act, after Beckmesser's bungled rendering of Walther's song, he becomes victim of collective Schadenfreude, the cruelty of which is in no way concealed. "He will soon be hanging on the gallows. You can see him already!" shout the assembled crowd.

In his book, Marc A. Weiner has pointed out the antisemitic clichés which Wagner used to create the Beckmesser character – from his posture and gait (limping, staggering and tumbling) to his strange features and staring eyes. In any case, the contemporary public immediately recognised the malicious caricature on stage. At the performances in Mannheim, Vienna and Berlin in 1869 and 1870 this resulted in public protests and even rioting. On the 14th March 1870 Cosima noted in her diary: "In the *Musikalische Zeitung* (Music Journal) is a report about the M[eister]Singer in Vienna. Amongst other things the J [Jews] there spread the word that Beckmesser's song was an old Jewish song which Wagner had wanted to satirise. R. says: None of our honorable cultural historians have said that things have gone so far that the Jews in the Imperial Theatre dare say: 'we don't want to hear this!'"

The Ring of the Nibelungen on the other hand is thoroughly imbued with the racist duality between the "Untermenschen" (sub-humans) – the Nibelungs or black elves - on the one hand and the Zukunftsmenschen (men of the future) on the other, represented by the hero Siegfried. Siegfried describes the appearance of his foster-father, Mime, as:

<i>g'rade so garstig,</i>	<i>(just so horrible)</i>
<i>griesig und grau,</i>	<i>(grizzly and grey)</i>
<i>klein und krumm,</i>	<i>(small and crooked)</i>
<i>höck'rig und hinkend,</i>	<i>(lumpy and hobbling)</i>
<i>mit hängenden Ohren,</i>	<i>(hanging ears)</i>
<i>triefigen Augen</i>	<i>(dripping eyes)</i>

He is denounced as a "Fratzenschmied" (literally "grimace-smith"), "loathsome botcher" and "shabby dwarf", who gives off a nasty smell. And finally Mime is also described as "a foul thief" and, with that, placed in an explicitly antisemitic context. That the *Ring* and the power associated with it is to be seen as the supposed world domination of the Jews was made absolutely public in the previously mentioned essay, *Erkenne dich selbst* (Know thyself). "The fateful Ring of the Nibelungs, if taken as a stock market portfolio, should bring an end to the horrific sight of the spooky world dominator (i.e. world jewelry)."

As the antithesis to the misshapen black elves, Mime and Alberich, stands the "youthfully beautiful male, Siegfried", "the real, naked human being", in whom, as Wagner wrote, "I was able to recognise every surge of blood, every twitch of powerful muscles, in unconstricted, freest movement: the truest human ever". Under the influence of Gobineau's writings, he attested the "genuine Aryanism" of Siegfried and Wotan's place as "the rightful god of the Aryans". Referring to Siegfried and Brünnhilde's love duet in the third act of *Siegfried*, he explained: "This is Gobineau music, [...] this is race. Who shall give me these two beings, who burst into jubilation as they look at each other: the whole world is there in order that two such beings should look at each other!".

In a letter to Ludwig II, which was written after the first performance of the Ring Cycle in Berlin, Wagner even went so far as to say: "It is certainly the most distinctive work of art of the Aryan race: no people on earth could be so clearly aware of the origins of the latter as the hitherto most purely preserved white race to arrive in Europe from High Asia. One must hope to be present to witness the success of a work such as this."

Marc A. Weiner has named and analysed the bodily codes by which Wagner pointed out the racial differences between "German" and "Un-German" – not only in the *Meistersinger* and the *Ring* but also ultimately in *Parsifal*: "Radiant eyes versus watery eyes, a sonorous voice versus a shrieking voice, the bodily odour of youthful love versus the stench of sulphur and farts, the steady stride of a muscular warrior versus the smell of a woman in a cave, the steady stride of a muscular warrior versus the crooked, hobbling gait of a small, hairy, goat-like creature with ashen or deathly pale skin: through such images of the body, Richard Wagner was able to illustrate his theories with the aid of metaphor."

Wagner did not have to stick a Jewish star onto the Jewish caricatures in his plays: contemporaries had no difficulty in understanding the antisemitic cultural codes. When Gustav Mahler conducted *Siegfried* at the Vienna Court Opera in September 1898, he commented on his tenor Julius Spielmann, who sang the role of Mime: "The worst thing about him is the mumbling. Although I am convinced that Wagner intended this pastiche of a Jew (in all the features with which he endowed him: the petty shrewdness, greed, and the whole musically and textually superb jargon), it must not for God's sake be overdone and laid on as thickly as Spielmann did - especially in Vienna at the *k. und k. Hofoper* (Imperial and Royal Opera House): it is blatant absurdity and for the Viennese a welcome scandal!". Mahler, together with the opera audiences of his time, was thus well aware of the antisemitic dynamite in Wagner's work.

Wagner himself also associated his "Bühnenweihfestspiel" ("Stage festival"), *Parsifal*, with Gobineau's racial doctrine. "Gobineau says that the Teutons were the last card that nature had to play, *Parsifal* is my last card, he explained in 1881. Wagner's essay, "*Christianity and Heroism*", the last to be published in his lifetime, appeared in the same year under the moniker of general decay: "We recognise the reason for the decline of historical humankind as well as the need for its regeneration: we believe in the possibility of this regeneration and devote ourselves to its fulfilment in every sense of the word."

Whereas in previous regeneration writings Wagner identified the consumption of animal flesh as the main reason for humanity's decay, now the focus shifted to the "mixing of the races", which was held responsible for the "corruption of the blood". This crude idea was served up to his readers as an answer to humanity's supposed racial decay - the blood of a pure, redeemed, antisemitic Christ: "The blood in the veins of the Redeemer should [...] serve as a divine sublimate for the for the salvation of humanity, which has succumbed in its noblest races". And further: "The blood of the whole suffering human species sublimating itself in that wonderful birth [...] and dedicating itself to this by nobly cleansing all stains from its blood." With these words, Wagner arrogates to himself the role of religious founder of an "Aryan" Christianity, cleansed of all Jewish origins.

Wagner's "last card", the "Bühnenweihfestspiel" *Parsifal*, with its sworn knighthood of the Grail awaiting redemption through the chaste youth, Parsifal ("der reine Tor" or "uncorrupted fool"), puts even die-hard Wagnerians to the test. A "witches brew of Christian pity, Buddhist-Schopenhauerian

renunciation and racist prejudice" is what Barry Millington called it. With its strange blood and supper rituals, a conclusive connection emerges: "At its darkest level", according to the American Wagner scholar Robert W. Gutman, Parsifal represents "the allegory of the Fall and redemption of the Aryan". "In Amfortas, the divine blood of Christ is contrasted with his own sinful blood, which has been made sinful by sexual intercourse with the racially inferior Kundry; this criminal miscegenation is the epitome of the Aryan dilemma."

There is no place for the demonically beautiful seductress Kundry in this Aryan male society: "Wild clothing, short-skirted; belt of snakeskin hanging down; black hair fluttering in loose plaits; deep reddish-brown complexion; piercing black eyes, sometimes flashing wildly, more often deathly still and immobile" - this is how she is characterised in the stage directions, a mixture of oriental Jewish seductress and subhuman. "She has nothing in common with you" shouts Gurnemanz to his knights. Wagner had already characterised Kundry as a Jewess, as the incarnation of Herodias, the original she-devil! (*Hell's rose! / You were Herodias, and what else? Gundryggia there, Kundry here!*) and cursed Ahasvera, who yearns for her salvation through Parsifal.

<i>Seit Ewigkeiten – harre ich deiner,</i>	<i>(For eternities – I have been waiting for you,)</i>
<i>des Heiland's, ach! so spät,</i>	<i>(Redeemer, ah! so late,)</i>
<i>den einst ich Kühn verschmäht. –</i>	<i>(whom I at one time despised. –)</i>
<i>Oh! Kennstest du den Fluch</i>	<i>(Oh! – you know the curse,)</i>
<i>der mich durch Schlaf und Wachen,</i>	<i>(which through sleeping and waking,)</i>
<i>durch Tod und Leben, Pein und Lachen,</i>	<i>(through death and life, pain and laughter,)</i>
<i>zu neuem Leiden neu gestählt</i>	<i>(newly steeled to new suffering,)</i>
<i>endlos durch das Dasein quält! – [...]</i>	<i>(endlessly tormented throughout existence! –)</i>
<i>Den ich ersehnt in Todesschmachten</i>	<i>(whom I craved in yearning for death,)</i>
<i>Den ich erkannt, den blöd Verlachten</i>	<i>(whom I recognised, the foolishly derided)</i>
<i>laß´ mich an seinem Busen weinen,</i>	<i>(let me weep at your breast,)</i>
<i>nur eine Stunde dir vereinen,</i>	<i>(be united with you for just one hour)</i>
<i>und, ob mich Gott und Welt verstöß´!</i>	<i>(and, whether God and the world shuns me!)</i>
<i>in dir entsündig´!t sein und erlös´!t</i>	<i>(be absolved and redeemed through you!)</i>

Kundry's "death yearnings" are finally answered. After she has washed his feet, she is baptised by the anointed Grail King Parsifal and redeemed in death - dressed up by Wagner in the music as a gesture of compassion. It is - as Robert Gutman has aptly observed - a black mass, celebrated here with the "sultry air of decadence" and the perversion of the symbols of the Eucharist.

Even his follower Nietzsche no longer wanted to pursue this path. He smelled "clouds of incense" and "the scent of church whores ", stating: "Richard Wagner, seemingly the most successful of people but in truth a rotten, despairing decadent, suddenly collapsed [...] in front of the Christian cross. " He thereby misconstrued the core content of *Parsifal*. Wagner was not concerned with Christianity, quite the opposite. The Christ of the Bayreuth religion was to be "cleansed of all Alexandrian-Judaic-Roman despotic deformity and redeemed, the incomparable and sublimely simple Redeemer", as Wagner

explained to his assistant, Hans von Wolzogen, in January 1880. To this end, he wanted to "relentlessly expose the church, Christianity, indeed the entire embodiment of Christianity in history". The religious community that Wagner founded with *Parsifal* is a bleak, misogynistic community, anti-Semitic and anti-clerical in equal degree, and conspiratorially sealed off from the outside world.

In the tenth volume of his *Gesammelte Schriften* (collected writings) published in 1883, Wagner himself combined the "Regeneration essays" (which, as Hartmut Zelinsky has remarked, are more appropriately considered as religious and racist antisemitic footnotes to accompany *Parsifal*) with the text of the opera to emphasise the clear connection between the two. Nevertheless, Wagner apologists close their eyes to this fact to this day. Dieter Borchmeyer wanted to get rid of it by unceremoniously omitting the offensive texts, as well as *Das Judentum in der Musik* (Judaism in Music), from his ten volume edition commemorating the centenary of the composer's death - "for reasons of intellectual level", as he explained, with the specious remark that anyone "who objects to a whitewashing of Wagner's image" can read the texts elsewhere. Instead of accepting reality, they hide behind Wagner's music and overlook its ideological, inhuman context.

Again and again, Wagner apologists justify their position by saying that one need not take the antisemitism of the "Master" seriously, because he had had Jewish friends in his circle. The catalogue of the infamous 1985 Bayreuth exhibition, "Wagner and the Jews", a typical Bayreuth token event intended to trivialise and appease, refers to "close friendships with Jews, which supposedly showed many prejudices against Wagner to be absurd". Among those mentioned in this context are the musicians Carl Tausig and Joseph Rubinstein as well as the conductor Hermann Levi, the director of the royal Hofkapelle (court orchestra), who conducted the première of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in 1882.

If one compares the blood ideology of Wagner's "Regeneration Writings" (1883) with the text of the tenth volume of *Parsifal* together with the "Gesammelte Schriften" (Collected Essays), the connection becomes clear. Nevertheless, Wagner apologists continue to close their eyes to this fact. Dieter Borchmeyer wanted to get rid of it by unceremoniously omitting the offensive texts, as well as "Das Judentum in der Musik" (Judaism in Music), from his ten volume edition commemorating the centenary of the composer's death - "for reasons of intellectual level", as he explained, with the specious remark that anyone "who objects to a white-washing of Wagner's image" can read the texts elsewhere. Instead of taking note of reality, they entrench themselves behind Wagner's music and disown its ideological, inhuman context.

Like all of his so-called regeneration writings, this one - the last to be published during his lifetime - is also under the sign of general decline: "We recognise the reason for the decline of historical humanity, as well as the necessity of its regeneration; we believe in the possibility of this regeneration, and devote ourselves to its realisation in every sense of the word. „

Whereas in the previous regeneration writings Wagner identified the consumption of animal flesh as the main reason for humanity's decay, now the focus shifted to the "mixing of the races", which was responsible for the "corruption of the blood". It is a crude idea that he serves up to his readers as an answer to humanity's supposed racial decay - the blood of a pure, redeemed, anti-Semitic Christ: "The blood in the veins of the Redeemer should [...] be used for the salvation of the human race, which has succumbed in its noblest races. as a divine sublimate of the species itself." And further: "The blood of the whole suffering human species, sublimating itself in that wonderful birth [...] donates itself to the

whole human race for the noblest cleansing of all stains of its blood. " With these words, Wagner arrogates to himself the religious founder of an "Aryan" Christianity, cleansed of all Jewish origins.

Wagner's "last card", the "Bühnenweihfestspiel" *Parsifal*, with its sworn knighthood of the Grail awaiting redemption through the chaste youth Parsifal ("der reine Tor"), puts even die-hard Wagnerians to the test. A "witch's brew of Christian pity, Buddhist-Schopenhauerian renunciation and racist prejudice" is what Barry Millington called it. If one looks at the blood ideology of Wagner's regeneration writings together with the text of the tenth volume of *Parsifal* and the *Gesammelte Schriften*, the connection becomes clear: "At its darkest level", according to the American Wagner-researcher, Robert W. Gutman, "*Parsifal* represents the allegory of the fall and redemption of the Aryans. In the case of Amfortas the divine blood of Christ stands in stark contrast to his own sinful blood, which has been desecrated by his having had sexual intercourse with the racially inferior Kundry. This criminal racial mixing is the embodiment of the Aryan dilemma.

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Again and again, Wagner apologists justify their position by saying that one need not take the anti-Semitism of the "master" seriously because he had Jewish friends in his circle. The catalogue of the infamous Bayreuth exhibition "Wagner and the Jews" from 1985 - a typical Bayreuth token event with the purpose of trivialisation and appeasement - speaks of "close friendships with Jews" who allegedly "by their personality alone led many of Wagner's prejudices ad absurdity". Among those mentioned in this context are the musicians Carl Tausig and Joseph Rubinstein as well as the conductor Hermann Levi, the director of the Hofkapelle (Royal Court Orchestra), who conducted the premiere of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in 1882.

None of these three can exonerate Wagner. Levi, who like many others was "devoted body and soul" to his "master", was treated by the latter with remarkable condescension. As conductor for his "Aryan" "Bühnenweihfestspiel" in Bayreuth, Wagner definitely did not want a Jewish Kapellmeister, but Ludwig II, who made his Hofkapelle available for the performance, insisted on Levi, so that Wagner was obliged to agree. In Bayreuth he let his hand be kissed by his "Hauskapellmeister" but grasped every opportunity he found to insult this son of a rabbi with antisemitic innuendos. He repeatedly hassled him by urging him to get baptised. In November 1880 Cosima recorded: "Very wound up, he tells Levi that he as a Jew only needed to learn to die, something which Levi understands only too well." The self-denying submissiveness of Levi went so far as to allow himself without further ado to explain to his co-religionists Wagner's demand for their annihilation: "He would hope, he disclosed to his "Master" on the 13th January 1879, that in 20 years they would have been exterminated root and branch and the audience of the 'Ring' would be passed over to a different people."

On one occasion Wagner presented without comment a letter to Levi from an anonymous antisemite who accused the latter of having an affair with Cosima and who demanded that Wagner

keep his work pure and not to allow a Jew to conduct it. Devastated, Levi left Bayreuth but then returned two days later. It was a sadomasochistic relationship which connected the "Master" with his "House Jew". When Wagner found the tempi dragging at the first *Parsifal* dress rehearsal on 24th July 1882, he remarked to his wife that: "he would not like to be conducted as a member of the orchestra by a Jew". This did not detract from the success of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth, and so Wagner took the liberty of snatching the baton from his Kapellmeister at the last performance and conducting the redemption scene in the last act himself - a demonstrative humiliation that was not even perceived as such by Levi. Wagner's judgement of his *Parsifal* conductor was later echoed by his son and successor at Bayreuth, Siegfried - referring to Levi in his autobiography, he wrote: "The Kundry nature was also in him".

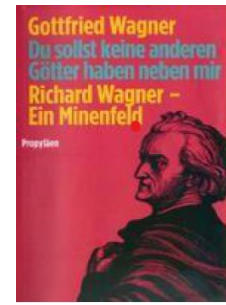
Wagner's relationship with the pianists Carl Tausig and Joseph Rubinstein was quite similar. The "master" also graciously put up with their services and yet made no secret of his contempt. Tausig, who was a tireless propagandist and fundraiser for Wagner, died of typhus in July 1871 at the age of only twenty-nine. Cosima commented on this with the words: "His death seems to us metaphysically justified; a poor being who has passed away at an early age, who has no faith in himself, who, in spite of everything that brings him close to us, nevertheless feels an inner deep strangeness (the Jewish one)." Later she referred to a conversation over coffee about "the blocks of ice, which melted in the sea of wretchedness". On this occasion, Wagner explained that it was "the article on Judaism" that had destroyed Tausig.

The vacant position as house and alibi Jew was then taken up by Joseph Rubinstein, who introduced himself to Wagner with the words: "I am a Jew - herewith everything is said for you", and stating that he sought his "redemption" in the composer. Wagner took Rubinstein on as his house pianist and had him prepare the piano scores for the *Siegfried Idyll* and *Parsifal* – without fee of course. To Cosima he confessed that Rubinstein's "restless Jewish nature is very antipathetic to him" and that he had "maintained the saddest qualities of his tribe". A year after Wagner's death, Rubinstein took his own life at the age of thirty-seven.

It is a tradition in Bayreuth to call on Jewish advocates for Wagner. They are welcome on the Grüner Hügel as servants who help to cleanse Wagner of his antisemitism. There is something deeply dishonest in this approach. One of the most recent attempts in this regard was made by Elke Heidenreich, who in February 2013 - just in time for Wagner's bicentenary birthday – joined the ranks of Wagner advocates with a major article in the German newspaper, DIE WELT. Under the heading "Ab jetzt wagnert's" (From now on it's Wagnerian), she reports how long she was persuaded as a post-war child that Wagner was an antisemite. And she tells of meeting an elderly woman at the Frankfurt Book Fair who asked her to find out what piece had "shaken her to the core" at the concert the night before. The woman in question was the American sex therapist Ruth Westheimer, whose parents were murdered in Auschwitz, and the shattering piece was the prelude to *Die Meistersinger*. Elke Heidenreich describes Westheimer's reaction as follows: "She went completely pale[...] and this clever woman thought: You have to hear him. That's wonderful." If the relatives of the victims of the Holocaust grant us absolution, we Germans can also devote ourselves to Wagner without remorse.

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Du sollst keine anderen Götter haben neben mir Richard Wagner - Ein Minenfeld



Gottfried H. Wagner

Chapter 12

translated from the German by Robert J.G. Chalmers

From the Redemption Company Inc. to the Final Redemption Temple

When Wagner died in Venice on 13 February 1883, he left no will. He had considered himself irreplaceable as an artist and even more so as the director of "his" festival. "I cannot name a single person," he wrote to Hans von Wolzogen in September 1882, "who could say the right thing to anyone involved in such a performance, be it the singers, the conductor, the director, the sewing machinist, the set designer or the costumier". And a few weeks later to Ludwig II: "Hereby I am getting myself ready for about ten more robust years of life by which time my son, to whom alone I trust entrust the spiritual and ethical maintenance of my work, will have reached his full maturity. I know of no one else to whom I could hand over my office." It would never have occurred to him that his wife Cosima would one day take his place. Nor would it have occurred to all those in Wahnfried who saw her mourn the loss of her divine husband. According to the diary of Cosima's daughter Daniela, her mother is said to have stepped up to the open coffin in the garden of Villa Wahnfried after the end of the master's grandiose funeral on 18 February 1883: "Mama stepped in, lay on the coffin for a long time until Fidi [Siegfried] came for her and we escorted her back."

It did not take long, however, for the widow to end the public mourning. After all, she did not even think of retiring from the large family business. Within two years, she managed to seize power in Bayreuth and proclaim herself Director of the Festival. She did not need to show any demonstrable qualifications as far as musical theatre direction and opera management were concerned. Her exclusive appeal to the will of the "Master" was enough to nip any resistance to her ambitions in the bud.

The Guardians of the Grail

Cosima's seizure of power on the Green Hill took place in stages and was strategically planned: she reworked the festival in the summer of 1883 - five months after Wagner's death - into a single cult celebration. She skilfully pushed through the dismissal of the singer Emil Scaria, who had risen to the position of stage manager, and who might have been able to compete with her. A few weeks later, she had a detailed staging plan for the festival up to 1889, including the cast lists. During the preparations for the plays the following year, the widow intervened in the opera work for the first time as an *eminence grise*. She followed the rehearsals from a hut built especially for

her in the wings and wrote down her corrections and instructions on slips of paper, which she passed wordlessly to musicians, conductors and singers. Discussions about this were undesirable. She also knew how to ward off the potential artistic and financial influence of the General Wagner Society by means of the newly founded Richard Wagner Foundation. And with the banker Adolf von Groß she had a financial advisor and asset manager at her side whom she trusted. Thus the servant wife of the "Master" became the Matriarch and Grail Mistress of the Hill. With her "model productions" of Wagner's works, which she staged from 1886, she set the direction of travel. In so doing, she relied on his detailed instructions in the scores, his explanatory writings, but above all on her exclusive personal connection to her husband. In her claim to sole representation, she could always refer to the "Master's will": thus she was able to transform the Festspielhaus into a cult site and the Festival into a dusty Wagner museum.

Cosima was just as decisive as she was merciless in securing Wagner's succession. Since there was no will, Wagner's biological children Isolde, Eva and Siegfried should have been entitled to inherit as well as her. But since Wagner, unlike in the case of his son, had never officially acknowledged the paternity of the two girls, Cosima was able to claim that they were the offspring of Bülow, to whom she was still officially married at the time of their birth. She was, however, still married when Siegfried was born! In order to secure the sole inheritance rights of "the Master's son", she had persuaded her ex-husband to sign a declaration in which he assured her that he did not recognise Siegfried as his son. Thus, at the price of the *de facto* disinheritance of Wagner's daughters Isolde and Eva, the succession of power was clarified. Isolde did not want to submit to this bending of the law. In 1913, she instigated legal proceedings to have her origins as Wagner's daughter confirmed by the courts, but without success. Because of this rebelliousness, however, she was disowned by her mother. Cosima did not care that she was already seriously ill at the time: she suffered from tuberculosis. Isolde died on 7 February 1919 at the age of fifty-three, a victim of her mother's merciless will for power. It was not to be the last family sacrifice.

And in other ways, too, the mistress stopped at nothing to elevate Wagner to the status of a saint. Anything that did not conform to this image had to be purged or destroyed. All the letters addressed to her by Nietzsche fell victim to her *auto-da-fé*, as did the letters of the rebellious Wagner disciple, Peter Cornelius. The letters of Hans von Bülow, Minna Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck, which she managed to get hold of, also went into the fire. She also worked on Wagner's autobiography "My Life", which had up until then appeared only in a few copies in private print, in preparation for the publication of the book. The embellished portrait of the Master's life, written with her active help from 1865 onwards, was still not beautiful enough for her, so she deleted the passages she found objectionable. With her policy of destruction, cover-up and whitewashing, the Grail Mistress of Bayreuth established an inglorious family

tradition. Her daughter Eva, for example, later burned Cosima's letters to her and blacked out numerous diary entries which Wagner had written in his *Brown Book*.

Cosima also set the course for the popularisation of Wagner's racist anti-Semitic messages, in particular by binding the reactionary English Wagner enthusiast Houston Stewart Chamberlain to herself and the family. In 1908 he married Eva von Bülow, the second daughter of Cosima and Richard Wagner. Chamberlain took over the post in Wahnfried that Wagner had once intended for Nietzsche: that of chief ideologist and propagandist of Wagnerian sentiments. What particularly qualified him for this role was his major work *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1899. The world view that was promulgated here in over a thousand pages was of captivating simplicity: world history, as Chamberlain saw it, was in truth nothing other than the ongoing "titanic struggle" between the despicable Semitic and the noble Aryan race. This poisonous mixture proved extremely popular. In Germany alone, over a hundred thousand copies of Chamberlain's book were sold by 1914. It rapidly became the bible of racial antisemitism, to which numerous disciples could refer, including Adolf Hitler.

Chamberlain was also one of the most important contributors to the propaganda magazine, *Bayreuther Blätter*, which had been founded by Richard Wagner in 1878. Its editor for sixty years until his death in 1938 was Hans Paul von Wolzogen, an assistant loyal to Wagner. The journal became the central organ of the Wagner cult and the closely associated ideology of "Völkisch Deutschtum" (nationalistic Germanness), Aryan regeneration, racial thinking and antisemitism. The up to eight thousand members of the Wagner societies received it free of charge for a time. One of the last issues of the "*Deutsche Zeitschrift im Geiste Richard Wagners*" (German magazine in the spirit of Richard Wagner, as it was called) stated: "From its first issue the *Bayreuther Blätter* [...] fought steadfastly for six decades in the spirit of Richard Wagner for Germany's unification, for Germany's honour and for the new Greater Germany. Its fight for "Rassegedanken" (literally "racial thinking") and against Jewish exploitation was just as passionate and undaunted.

Bayreuth pocket calendars were added as a further organ of the Association with the same ideological thrust and idolisation of the master: "Blessed are all those who "live" in Wagner's works," preached the Wagner disciple Arthur Seidl, "for they shall have "eternal life". In countless wordy essays, the beliefs of Wagner's Germanic-Christian doctrine of salvation were disseminated. As a "cultural task of the new millennium", an "educational reform" was necessary, in the centre of which Wagner's "enthusiasm" had to stand as a "fundamental reality [...] for all ideal blossoming of the imagination". The mistress herself stood in the background as the "unnamed main editor". From time to time, Cosima also took up the pen herself. Her articles appeared under the not particularly original pseudonym "Wahnfried".

None of the apologist Wagner scholars has ever seriously grappled with the ideology of the *Bayreuth Blätter*. No wonder: they disturb the image of Wagner they have carved out for themselves – on the one hand, the master's grandiose stage work, pure and unsullied by any ideology; on the other, the "Bayreuth Circle" of the widow Cosima, with Wolzogen, Chamberlain and others who would have "misunderstood" Wagner and misused him for their ideological purposes, a bold distortion of the facts that is still common today. For all the ideology that the "Bayreuth Circle" propagated in Wagner's name, they could always be sure that it was in accordance with the fundamental will of the Master. It was Wagner himself who founded the *Bayreuther Blätter*, appointed Wolzogen as editor-in-chief and published his nationalist and racially anti-Semitic regeneration writings there. The antisemitism researcher, Annette Hein, was the first to subject the approximately twenty thousand pages of the sixty volumes to a fundamental analysis. The result of her study, which appeared in 1996 and has been studiously ignored by orthodox Wagner scholars to this day, is unequivocal: according to Hein, the Bayreuth Blätter show that "Wagner and his views do not have to be appropriated after his death for thoughts and ideologies that were not already inherent in them". She goes on: "It [the journal] functions as a medium for the consolidation and dissemination of antisemitic forms of argument from the beginnings of so-called political antisemitism in the eighties of the last [19th] century up until the Third Reich."

The Wagner apologists could, of course, have already read it in Nietzsche. A year after Wagner's death in 1884, the philosopher passed the following judgement on his journal: "Do you know what a swamp is? Chance allowed me to see once again everything that Richard Wagner and his people preached in words side by side with the pernicious Bayreuther Blätter. "Do you know what a swamp is? Presumption, obscurity, ignorance and tastelessness all mixed up. As the old man sings, so the young chirp: no one will be surprised at that. Were that it were only a song! But it is a whine, the pomposity of an old high priest who fears nothing more than bright, clear ideas."

Siegfried Land

Like Richard Wagner before her, the new mistress of Bayreuth sought funding for the festival from the highest rank of the empire. Unlike Wilhelm I, one could have legitimate hopes for his grandson, who ascended the throne as Wilhelm II in 1888. His penchant for pomp and theatrical gestures was widely known. Wilhelm had already been introduced to Wahnfried in 1886 by Philipp Fürst zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld, his educator and confidant, where he declared that Bayreuth must become the "German Olympia". Cosima hoped for an imperial patronage of the festival, but the emperor could not be persuaded to agree to this, probably out of diplomatic consideration for Bavaria. Musically, he preferred cheerful material in the style of Lortzing to Wagner's heavy fare. But that did nothing to dampen the triumph of Wagner's musical dramas

and the ideology associated with them in the Empire. Germany became "Siegfried-Land": from the dumb nature boy of the Ring grew the image of the "sun-blond heroic boy", which, as Thomas Mann remarked, made "the breast of German youth swell with exhilaration at their manly splendour". "There is always someone," wrote Walther Rathenau in 1918, "Lohengrin, Walther, Siegfried, Wotan, who can do anything and conquer all, redeeming suffering virtue, chastising vice and bringing universal salvation, and all this in a sweeping pose, with fanfares, lighting effects and tableaux."

When the German Empire went to war on 1 August 1914 and the Bayreuth Festival had to be prematurely cancelled, the Kaiser and the Supreme Army Command could be sure of the support of the Bayreuth home front. "The war seems to suit us Germans decidedly better than peace, where everything un-German spreads," Cosima wrote to Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg at New Year 1915. Hans von Wolzogen expressed his conviction in the Bayreuther Blätter that the war would lead to a nobler, "pure German cultural state" and that "souls ripe for Wagner" would emerge from it.

The sabre-rattling Wilhelm II demanded "Nibelung loyalty" from the fraternal subjects of the Habsburg Empire. Even when surrounded by enemies and fighting a losing battle, it was important to persevere for the sake of the German cause. Soon the battle fronts were named after the characters of the Ring; thus there were Wotan, Brunhild and Hunding positions on the bloodily contested Western Front. An abuse of Wagner's noble work? But was it not Wagner himself who had associated the Franco-Prussian War with his Nibelung drama in 1871 and had sung the song of "Sieg-Fried" ("Victory-Peace") to Kaiser Wilhelm I?

In March 1917, the Supreme Army Command decided to expand the "Siegfried Position" on the Western Front, to which the German troops retreated in the "Alberich Movement". The will to destruction that accompanied this retreat did credit to Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Ernst Jünger described the work of destruction in his *Stahlgewittern* (Steel storms): "By the time we reached the Siegfried position, every village was a heap of rubble, every tree felled, every road undermined, every well polluted, the course of the river dammed up, every cellar blown up or endangered by hidden bombs, all supplies and metals carried back, every rail unscrewed, every telegraph wire unrolled, everything combustible burned, in short: we turned the land awaiting the advancing enemy into a wasteland."

A war that could not be won could still be heroically glorified. The last army offensive in the West under General Ludendorff was called the "Hagen attack" - then came the hour of surrender. Who was responsible for the defeat? Field Marshal von Hindenburg knew exactly: "Like Siegfried under the deceitful spear-throw of the fierce Hagen, our weary front fell; in vain it had tried to give new life from the dwindling source of home strength". The spear throw became the insidious stab in the back - and the "stab in the back" legend was born, according to which the German army,

"undefeated in the field", had received "the stab in the back" from the revolutionary enemies of the Reich at home – Jews, democrats and socialists. "Those who did not join the fight at that time," Hitler's *Mein Kampf* states, "were the parliamentary vagabonds, this entire politicising party rabble. They had for so long agitated and raged against certain victory until the fighting Siegfried eventually succumbed to the treacherous stab in the back".

Despite the fact that Germany had lost the war, the Festspielhaus continued to "tower over the beloved hill, proclaiming in its silence a better time". There, too, all hopes now rested on a Siegfried - the only male descendant of the master, who had been named after the heroic stage figure and had been repeatedly dressed up as "Little Siegfried", even as a child. It was a heavy burden but the model son complied. When Cosima relinquished the sceptre in 1908 due to her poor health, he took her place and directed the Festival until his death in 1930. In the family business and beyond, he was also active as a conductor and director. As well as these roles he composed operas and instrumental works but suffered from the fact that they did not receive the recognition he wished for. The only one who was unreservedly convinced of the greatness of his work was his mother. She also remained the only woman he loved. In vain the mistress of the hill tried to keep her son's secret: he was gay. He would have much rather been a free artist in Italy than festival director in Bayreuth. But the Wagner clan took its toll.

In order to preserve the family dynasty and probably also to ward off a public scandal because of his homosexuality, his mother demanded marriage and offspring. In 1914, forty-five-year-old Siegfried was joined by seventeen-year-old Winifred Klindworth, whom he married the following year. Over four years she provided him with a child every year: Wieland (born 1917), Friedelind (born 1918), Wolfgang (born 1919) and Verena (born 1920). With this, Siegfried had done his duty as a producer, and he retired to his "bachelor's house" in the garden of Villa Wahnfried, where he used to receive his friends.

After the war, people waited in Wahnfried for the "rebirth" of the nation. The Weimar Republic - the first democracy on German soil - would not bring it, of that they were sure in the Bayreuth circle. "Mama asks," Cosima's daughter Eva recorded in March 1919, "Why doesn't Ludendorff become our dictator?" And when Mussolini seized power in Italy in October 1922, Cosima recognised in him the "statesmanlike personality" she missed so much in Germany: "What one hears of him suggests a power, and certainly he will remember what Germany did for Italy."

She did not have to wait much longer for the Saviour: on 30 September 1923, the NSDAP^a organised a "German Day" in Bayreuth, at which six thousand participants

^a NSDAP: Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)

marched. Chamberlain and his mother-in-law Cosima waved at the marchers from an open window. The following day, Hitler visited the Wahnfried house for the first time; from then on, the Wagner clan - Chamberlain as well as Siegfried and Winifred - fell for the Wagnerian from Braunau.

A month later, on 9 November 1923, Hitler and Ludendorff attempted a putsch in Munich with two thousand followers. This action was supported unreservedly in Wahnfried. Hitler was arrested as he fled, and Winifred, alluding to Wagner's Siegmund figure from *Die Walküre*, told the Bayreuth NSDAP members on 12 November: "Believe me, Adolf Hitler is, in spite of everything, the coming man, and he will just pull the sword out of the German oak tree after all." Now she saw the hour had come to confess to the world her loyalty to the arrested putschist in the name of the entire Wagner family - in an "Open Letter" in the Bayreuth *Oberfränkische Zeitung*, published five days after the failed coup: "All of Bayreuth knows that we are on friendly terms with Adolf Hitler. [...] His personality has made a profound and moving impression on us, as it has on everyone who has come into contact with it, and we have understood how such a simple, physically delicate person is capable of exercising such power. [...] I admit without hesitation that we too are under the spell of this personality, that we too, who stood by him in the days of happiness, now also remain loyal to him in the days of adversity." And Siegfried seconded, "My wife fights like a lion for Hitler! Great!"

During Hitler's imprisonment in Landsberg, Winifred made sure that the prominent prisoner wanted for nothing. She sent "love packages" including the stationery which Rudolf Hess used to write down Hitler's dictation of *Mein Kampf*. From the beginning, Winifred's devotion to Hitler bore fanatical, erotically charged messianic traits. "Either he becomes our saviour," she wrote on New Year's Day 1924, "or he, the physically delicate one, is left to perish miserably in prison! But then, woe to Germany!!!"

Just as in Richard Wagner's life there was no difference between reality and his stage characters, so Winifred and Siegfried Wagner's world, illuminated by the slight figure of Hitler, was mirrored in Wagner's musical dramas. When Ludendorff, who unlike Hitler had been acquitted in the trial which followed the attempted putsch, visited Bayreuth in April 1924 as a *völkisch* election speaker, Winifred wrote about the rally: "In the sky a blood-red setting sun: Twilight of the Gods, last sanctuary! At the Reithalle, music, parading of the Front ... four thousand people head to head." She added with satisfaction that Ludendorff knew "no compromise" on the "Jewish question". Meanwhile, Chamberlain wrote to Hitler in prison that the war hero Ludendorff was more of a "Siegfried nature", while the Führer was to be designated as of a "Parsifal nature".

When the first Bayreuth Festival took place in July 1924 following a ten-year break and nine years before Hitler's seizure of power, games were already openly taking

place under the sign of the swastika. The black, white and red flag of the Kaiserreich flew on the roof of the Festspielhaus. The Bayreuth Gazette headlined its spring issue under Hitler's motto: "The outer struggle must be preceded by the inner struggle. Our struggle is for the sacred objective." The title page of the Official Bayreuth Festival Guide 1924 was adorned with Siegfried's sword and the verse "Nothung! Nothung! New and rejuvenated! To life I wake thee again!" The declaration printed inside raised Nothung to the status of a battle sword against the Weimar Republic and Bayreuth to the status of a "German armoury": "Only if we go forth into the great German liberation struggle with heroism in our breasts comparable to that of the Knights of the Grail shall we, when the struggle commences, succeed in tearing the Nothung sword from its trunk, and no world god will be able to shatter it for us! We will draw our strength from the spirit of Bayreuth!"

A few pages further on, one could read the words: "It cannot be denied that foreigners, especially those who are not racially oriented or not very Nordic, often have a somewhat alien - or at least not genuinely Bavarian - attitude to the inner essence of Richard Wagner's art". Jews, republicans, social democrats, pacifists and all things considered "un-German" were gladly dispensed with. In Winifred's words: "...a few Nagods less". And further: "Whoever really feels and thinks German comes here."

The Festival opened on 22 July 1924 with *Die Meistersinger* in Cosima's museum-like production of 1911. When Hans Sachs finished with his final verses "Uns bliebe gleich / die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!" the audience rose from their seats and sang the first verse of the Deutschlandlied: "Von der Maas bis an die Memel, von der Etsch bis an den Belt ...". Jewish visitors who had come to Bayreuth despite public warnings were spat on and jeered at in the streets. Thomas Mann commented on the events in the *Hamburger Nachrichten* as follows: "Wagner will never cease to interest me [...] but Bayreuth as it presents itself today does not interest me at all, and I must believe the world will never be interested in it again either."

Externally, Siegfried Wagner strove to dispel the fatal impression of the "brown" festival. He distanced himself from the antisemitic slurs and slogans in order to keep Jewish sponsors and foreign guests in line. But as festival director he had allowed them, and in his private remarks he called Hitler a "glorious man" and saw "Jew and Jesuit walking arm in arm" "in order to exterminate Germanness". He was not to live to see the Third Reich under the leadership of the "glorious man". During the preparations for the 1930 Festival, he suffered a heart attack during a rehearsal of *Götterdämmerung*, from which he never recovered. The master and model son died on 4 August 1930 at the age of sixty-one, only four months after his grandmother Cosima had died on 1 April at the age of ninety-two. The joint will of the Wagner couple of 8 March 1929 provided for Winifred as the limited heir and the four children "in equal shares" as the subsequent heirs. And so, the day after her husband's death, the fanatical Hitler worshipper Winifred ascended the Bayreuth throne.

Winnie and Wolf

As early as 1925, Adolf Hitler visited the Bayreuth Festival for the first time after being released early from prison. He took the opportunity to present Winifred with a copy of *Mein Kampf*, hot off the press, with a handwritten dedication. In the meantime, he was on good terms with the lady of the house and was called "Wolf" by her and "Uncle Wolf" by the children. When "Uncle Wolf" came to power in Berlin on 30 January 1933, Richard Wagner became the "house composer" of the Reich, Bayreuth became the court theatre and the whole of Nazi Germany became a single Wagnerian stage. To celebrate his "Third Reich", Hitler staged the "Potsdam Day" on 21 March 1933, exactly sixty-two years after Bismarck had convened the first Reichstag of the German Empire, facing assembled front-line soldiers, he shook hands with the aged Reich President Hindenburg in front of the Garrison Church and allowed himself to be celebrated as a worthy heir to the Prussian kings and emperors.

At the end and climax of the day of Germany's "rebirth", a gala performance of Wagner's *Meistersinger* at the Berlin State Opera took place, conducted by Hitler's favourite conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler. Joseph Goebbels wrote about it in his diary: "Everything is immersed in music. Now the radiant "Wacht auf!" chorus has had its meaning restored." It was only a short distance from Wagner's "Wake up!" call to the Nazi slogan, "Deutschland, erwache!", "Germany, wake up!".

Nuremberg was soon allowed to proclaim itself the "City of the Meistersinger and the Reich Party Rallies". On top of this the Führer gave the clearest expression of his veneration for Richard Wagner and his work by linking for all time the name of the master with the city of the Reich Party Rallies by designating the Meistersinger of Nuremberg as the "Festival of the Reich Party Rallies". This is set out in the book "*Richard Wagner und die Stadt der Meistersinger*" (Richard Wagner and the City of the Mastersingers) published in 1938 and advertised as a "people's book for every German" with handwritten greetings from Winifred Wagner and Eva Chamberlain-Wagner. The book went on to state: "It is a miraculous coincidence that this great genius in the realm of art, the opponent of the Jews, who was fought and besieged by Jews and their sympathisers in the most vile manner, was honoured in Nuremberg, the city from which Julius Streicher has been waging his difficult struggle against world Jewry for many years. Thus Richard Wagner's ideological aims in life has also found glorious fulfilment in the city of his Meistersinger, the metropolis of the world struggle against Jewry, where the Führer proclaimed the laws for the protection of German blood, the Nuremberg laws, at the "Reichsparteitag der Ehre"(Reich Party Congress of Honour)."

As had become the custom for the annual Reich Party Congress, the Führer attended a "festive performance" of Die Meistersinger in the Nuremberg Opera House

on the 10th September 1935. With Beckmesser's expulsion from the stage, the guests were allowed to get in the mood for the mass spectacle that was to follow. On 15 September, the Nuremberg Race Laws were passed unanimously by the Reichstag, which had been summoned to Nuremberg especially for this purpose. Marriages between Jews and non-Jews were henceforth forbidden and German Jews were deprived of their citizenship.

But it was not only *Die Meistersinger* that was highly regarded in the Third Reich. At the opening of the Nuremberg party congresses, the overture of Hitler's favourite opera *Rienzi* was played, dubbed the "secret anthem of the Third Reich". When a representative of the Nazi empire died, the funeral march from *Götterdämmerung* was played on the radio. And when Hitler visited the Bayreuth Festival in the summer, the newsreel showed the crowd cheering for their leader in the streets of the "City of Richard Wagner", accompanied by the sounds of the "Master". When Robert Ley, head of the Reich organisation of the NSDAP, suggested replacing the *Rienzi* overture with a new composition that would also express the National Socialist world view musically, Hitler rejected him harshly: "You know, Ley, I don't open the party congresses with the *Rienzi* overture by chance. This is not just a musical question. This son of a small innkeeper, at the age of twenty-four, led the Roman people to drive out the corrupt Senate by invoking the Empire's great past. With this God-blessed music I had the inspiration as a young person in the Linz theatre that I too must succeed in uniting the German Empire and making it great."

Hitler, however, also knew only too well how the opera ended: with the downfall of the tribune of the people amid the burning ruins of his capital. Much has been written about what fascinated Hitler about Wagner. He himself declared that, with the exception of Wagner, he had had "no predecessors", and he described his idol as "the greatest prophetic figure possessed by the German people". Wagner's apologists have always made it particularly easy for themselves by denying Hitler's inner kinship with his "forerunner" and portraying his love of Wagner as something purely coincidental. "Should we send all vegetarians packing and ostracise all sheepdog owners just because there was Blondi and Hitler didn't eat meat?" asks Music Director Thielemann polemically in his Wagner book. In so doing, he fails to recognise the deep similarity between Wagner's and Hitler's characters.

Joachim Fest vividly described how close they were in his biography of Hitler: "In *Rienzi* or *Lohengrin*, *Stolzing* or *Tannhäuser*, the rejected academy of art applicant recognised exaggerated versions of his own confrontation with the world in front of the box of paints in the reading-room of the men's hall of residence, and sometimes it almost seems as if he had lived up to the admired role model [...]." There is Wagner's own irrepressible "intent to overwhelm", like Hitler's: "It is this unabashed, naked look at effects that characterises Wagner's music like no other, the constant self-seduction through long-winded, overhyped and overexaggerated effects, when the unmistakable

mixture of Valhalla, revue and religious sacrament is unfolded amid sharp rosin flashes. [...] The style adopted by the Third Reich for their epic events would have been unthinkable without this operatic tradition, without the truly demagogic artistry of Richard Wagner." There is the "element of the vulgar and the disreputable", the trait of "ingenious deceitfulness and inspired humbuggery" and the "theatrical relationship to the world": "It was the total aesthetic transformation of life under the leadership of art that he [Wagner] proclaimed. In this way, the state was to be elevated to the height of a work of art and politics was to be renewed and perfected through the spirit of art. In the theatricalisation of public life in the Third Reich and the passion of the regime for elaborate staging, [...] elements of this programme are readily identifiable." In addition, there is the tendency to "dilettantise": "Both show the same striking need for opinionated intervention in all areas, a tormenting ambition to have to prove oneself, to dazzle, to impress, to surpass instantly and spectacularly the rapidly fading glory of yesterday." The dependence of Hitler, a Wagnerian, on his role model went down to the smallest detail: "Even the well-known formula from *Mein Kampf*, which records Hitler's "decision" to become a politician, is paraphrased from a Wagnerian phrase: "I decided to become a musician".

The gesture of the upstart, the dilettante trait of the all-rounder, the craving for power and seduction, the tendency to overestimate oneself, the thinking in terms of the enemy, the daredevilry and the gambler's nature, the gesture of putting all one's eggs in one basket, of all or nothing – in all this Hitler is Wagner's revenant on the political stage. In this respect, it is not surprising that *Rienzi* became Hitler's favourite opera. The call for "cure by fire" and the desire for "Untergang" (downfall) were common to both. "In the most insignificant of Wagner's musical dramas, *Rienzi*, the alternatives of final victory or catastrophe had found its most radical expression," says Saul Friedländer. But the *Ring of the Nibelung*, with its eternal struggle between the "Aryan" White Elves and the "Jewish" Black Elves, is also marked by this apocalyptic ideology.

Furthermore, and especially with his fanatical racial anti-Semitism, Wagner proved to be a "prophetic figure" for his revenant. Hitler had studied the political writings of the "master" in his youth just as enthusiastically as he had listened to his operas. At the age of twenty-three he wrote at the foot of a sketch he had made for a Siegfried costume: "Young Siegfried, well known from the days of the Linz opera. Wagner's opera was the first to show me what blood myth is." He saw the annihilation of the Jews as his mission and himself as an instrument of providence and the redeemer of humanity. "The Nazi messiah never tired of repeating that his fight against the Jews was a matter of life or death, an absolute *either/or*." And if victory was not possible, there remained heroic doom. As Saul Friedländer put it, "The deep influence of Richard Wagner on Adolf Hitler certainly emanated from the former's death cult: from *Rienzi*'s sacrifice by fire to the downfall of Valhalla in flames. In Hitler's empire, which existed

for twelve years, this mythical-aesthetic Wagnerian cult of death and redemption became the murderous impetus for destruction and extermination."

Hitler even staged his own downfall as a poor imitation of a Wagner opera. He forced his secret lover, Eva Braun, whom he took as his wife in their last hours in the Führerbunker, to go with him to his death. Joseph Goebbels also demanded loyalty to the death from his family. One day after Hitler's suicide, he had his six children poisoned with cyanide before he and his wife took poison themselves.

Hitler came to Wahnfried as saviour but then left it in ruins. As early as 1934, Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry commandeered eleven thousand Festival tickets, representing one third of the total. Considerable sums regularly flowed into the Festival coffers for the broadcasting rights for national radio, the Reichsrundfunk. But Hitler did not allow himself to be deprived of his role as the true patron saint of Bayreuth: his Reich Chancellery had by 1939 already supported the Festival with over half a million Reichsmarks. Even during the war years, when most of Germany's theatres were closed, the doors of the Nazi court theatre remained open for the "War Festival". In 1933, according to Winifred Wagner, Hitler "had helpfully stood by her with all his devotion and love for Richard Wagner and Bayreuth"; but even in the midst of the enemy bombardment towards the end of the war, "the Führer now stood by us with advice and action and immediately ordered that the Festival should continue despite the war".

On Hitler's orders, the organisation "Kraft durch Freude" (Strength through Joy), a subsidiary of the German Labour Front, bought all the tickets and paid almost all the bills. Thus, from 1940 onwards, at least one million Reichsmarks flowed every year to Bayreuth from this source alone and in the years from 1942 onwards it was 1.3 million Reichsmarks. Five percent of the sum went directly to Winifred Wagner as a fee for directing the festival. Wounded soldiers, armament workers and Red Cross workers were given free admission to the performances for their spiritual edification. In the summer of 1943, members of the Hitler Youth, the Bund Deutscher Mädel and the SS-Standarte Wiking, also took to the stage as performers in *Die Meistersinger*.

The ties between the Nazi organisation "Kraft durch Freude" ("Strength through Joy") and the Wagner family soon became familial as well: KdF leader Bodo Lafferentz married Verena Wagner, the youngest of Winifred's daughters in Wahnfried on 26 December 1943. Thus, in many ways, the Wagners became accomplices of the criminal Hitler regime which they supported without reservation. In her welcome preface to the reissued volume "Richard Wagner und seine Meistersinger", given as a memento to the "guests of the Führer" at the 1943 festival, Winifred wrote that the Meistersinger showed "in the most impressive form the creative German man moulded in his "völkisch" creative will [...] which, in the present struggle of the occidental-cultural world with the destructive spirit of the plutocratic-Bolshevik world conspiracy, gives

our soldiers the insurmountable fighting strength and the fanatical belief in the victory of our weapons".

The artistic director of the Bayreuth Nazi Festival from 1931 onwards was the director and conductor Heinz Tietjen, who worked alongside Winifred Wagner. He is the Mephistopheles of the German opera scene in the first half of the 20th century: his career ran seamlessly from the German Empire through the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich to the Federal Republic. In 1927 he was appointed general director of all Prussian state theatres and thus presided over seven stages in Germany. Four years later, in 1931, he was responsible for the closure of the *Krolloper* in Berlin, which had gained a reputation as an avant-garde venue with premieres of works by Schönberg, Stravinsky and Hindemith. By doing so, he recommended himself as a "stirrup-holder" (lackey) for the Nazis, for whom the "reddish-Jewish" Kulturinstitut (Cultural Institute) was a particular thorn in the flesh. Under Tietjen's leadership, the Bayreuth Festival, together with the Berlin State Opera and the Berlin Philharmonic, contributed decisively to maintaining the shiny cultural façade behind which the barbaric face of Nazi Germany was concealed. Tietjen managed to play Goebbels and Göring off against each other and at the same time ingratiate himself with Hitler. But he also knew how to influence the Wagners in his favour and to secure his position in Bayreuth through continual intrigues. Above all he tried to keep Winifred's sons Wolfgang and Wieland in check whilst they were positioning themselves to succeed their mother and Tietjen as directors of the Festival.

While Hitler's Wehrmacht was reducing Europe to rubble, Wolfgang and Wieland Wagner were engaged in a brutal struggle for power on Festival Hill that was hardly inferior to that for the Ring of the Nibelung. From childhood onwards, both were used to power intrigues in the Wahnfried house and were also played off against each other time and time again. As the eldest son, Wieland saw himself as the natural successor to the Wagner dynasty. This was also the view of "Uncle Wolf", who protected him. In 1938 Wieland joined the NSDAP, and from the beginning of the war he was exempted from any military service by order of the Führer. During the 1943/44 "War Festival" Wieland was responsible for the stage decoration of the *Kraft-durch-Freude Meistersinger*. His plan for Wolfgang was at best a place in the administration but his no less power-conscious brother did not agree with this. He, too, profited from his special status as a member of the Wagner family. Unlike Wieland, Wolfgang had learned opera management from scratch at Hans Tietjen's State Opera in Berlin. Before either brother could settle the power struggle the Wahnfried House lay in ruins. It was hit by an allied bombing raid on 5 April 1945. Six days later following another attack a third of Richard Wagner's "city" lay in ruins.

A dark chapter in the family history is Wieland Wagner's work for the so-called "Institute for Physical Research" from September 1944 to April 1945. This was a Bayreuth satellite camp of the Flossenbürg concentration camp. The concentration

camp branch was under the direction of his brother-in-law, the KdF boss, Bodo Lafferentz, who was an SS-Obersturmbannführer and was awarded the SS Death's-Head ring for his "loyalty to the Führer". The secret institute had the task of working on the development of a "miracle weapon" – a "seeing bomb" that would improve the targeting accuracy of rockets. The labour force was recruited principally from the Flossenbürg concentration camp; camp management and supervision were the responsibility of the SS. Of the eighty-five forced labourers employed at the "Institute", eleven did not survive the end of the war. When a Russian inmate managed to escape in December 1944, eighteen prisoners were deported to Flossenbürg concentration camp. Numerous others later died on the death marches.

According to Lafferentz, his brother-in-law, Wieland, built stage models in the Bayreuth satellite concentration camp. Wieland, who could have provided information about his activities there, hid this chapter of his life until his death. The fact that the public learned of the existence of the secret camp at all is thanks to the research of Bayreuth schoolgirl, Karin Osiander, who wrote a dissertation about it in 1989. Since 2003, a detailed report on the Bayreuth camp by Albrecht Bald and Jörg Skribeleit has been available, in which the fate of the inmates was investigated. The camp workshop existed up until 1994 when it was demolished by the town – a Concentration Camp close to the theatre does not fit in with the image of Richard Wagner's town which it wished to promulgate. A memorial stone in a car park is the only reminder of this dark chapter.

When Hitler took his life in his bunker on the 30th April 1945, the funeral march from Götterdämmerung was broadcast across the nation by the Reich's radio. Ten days beforehand Winifred had sent "Wolf" yet another final birthday letter to his bunker and true to the Nibelung, she remained devoted to her great idol after his death right up to the end of her life on the 5th March 1980, despite his having led the whole of Europe into the abyss and his responsibility for the murder of six million Jews. Away from the public eye, she never concealed her unbroken devotion to her "Führer". In the documentary film she made with Hans-Jürgen Syberberg in 1975 she explained frankly: "If Hitler were to come through the door here today, for instance, I would be just as happy and pleased as ever to see him and welcome him. I know he had his dark side, but for me this does not exist, as I do not recognise it. You know, for me the only thing which counts in a relationship to another human being is personal experience." And in her delusion Winifred Wagner found nothing she could have blamed Hitler for since her first meeting with her saviour in 1923.

It was not until 2008, and following ever louder international protests directed at Bayreuth as the stronghold of Wagner tourism, that the town began to grapple more critically with its own history during the Third Reich. That year saw the publication of the documentary *"Eine Stadt wird entnazifiziert. Die Gauhauptstadt Bayreuth vor der Spruchkammer"* (A town is denazified. The District Capital Bayreuth in front of the

denazification tribunal.) The publication lacks, however, any critical discussion of Wagner's ideology and his influence on Hitler. The documentary Jüdisches Bayreuth (Jewish Bayreuth) published in 2010 is similarly reticent. It is one of the first more in-depth attempts to discuss the horror of the Nazi period and its consequences for the Jews in Bayreuth. In common with the earlier publication from 2008, however, Wagner's rabid antisemitic racism and its effect on Hitler are not openly discussed. There is reticence to lay bare the Bayreuth Wagner cult and the strong links between the Wagner clan and the town. A proper reappraisal of this inglorious state of affairs is yet to be accomplished.

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